

September 2025 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Council remains opposed to pylon project, as application submitted

Primarily, the county council maintains that offshore and undergrounding solutions should be priorities for the scheme, not 114 miles of pylons cutting through countryside, sensitive landscapes and communities in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Previously, SCC has formally and strongly requested that National Grid pauses the Norwich to Tilbury proposals, to allow for effective consideration of offshore alternatives. When the full details of National Grid's application are published next month, we hope they reflect many of the concerns raised by us, and local communities, from consultations and discussions. The application for the Development Consent Order - essentially planning permission - was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) by National Grid on Friday 29 August. PINS has 28 days to determine whether or not to accept the application. Should it be accepted, full details of the project will then be published, with the six-month Examination period likely to begin in early 2026. If consent was then granted, construction could begin in 2027. In its current guise, the Norwich to Tilbury pylon project is not suitable. The less damaging alternatives, such as offshore transmission or high voltage direct current undergrounding, have never been fully considered. Such a significant and impactful project should not be determined simply for being the cheapest and fastest solution. The Hiorns Report concluded that proposals were premature and would not be needed until the mid-2030s. When the full details of National Grid's application are published next month, we hope they reflect many of the concerns raised by us, and local communities, from consultations and discussions. We have highlighted the need for numerous local mitigations, issues around airfields, construction traffic, public rights of way, removal of existing pylon lines, the list goes on. For example, we consider there to be a robust case for undergrounding where the line crosses the Waveney Valley – only to be told earlier this year, that this was not going to happen, and that was that without any alternative mitigation proposed. Suffolk County Council's response to previous consultations for the Norwich to Tilbury project can be found at suffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk's once-in-a-generation, state-of-the-art fire control room goes live

Delivered in just 18 months, a short timeframe for a project of this scale, the initiative involved building a brand-new contact centre from the ground up, recruiting and training an entirely new team, and implementing bespoke configurations tailored to all the communities in Suffolk. The new control room, powered by cutting-edge technology from Motorola Solutions, now serves as a future-ready, cloud-enabled hub for managing critical 999 emergency calls across the county. The decision to invest in a new control room for the county was made in 2023, following recognition that the previous system was no longer fit for purpose. The legacy system's increasing fragility meant the fire service could no longer depend on or guarantee the resilience that Suffolk's communities deserve. The new control room includes several helpful new features that will support Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service in responding to emergencies more effectively:

Better preparation for major incidents – The system helps the team respond more quickly and manage operations more smoothly during large-scale emergencies, like floods and wildfires, which are becoming increasingly common in the UK.

Remote access – Staff can now securely log in to the control system from any location, making it easier to set up mobile command centres or offer support remotely when needed.

Improved call and data handling – A new system stores and organises control room voice recordings more securely, keeping all key information in one place and linking it to the right incidents.

Stronger regional teamwork – The control room is part of a wider hub with Hertfordshire and Norfolk fire services, allowing the teams to support each other and share the load during busy periods, such as when multiple 999 calls are received simultaneously.

This is an incredible achievement - it demonstrates our commitment to innovation and protecting Suffolk's residents with the very best emergency response services. Delivering this in just 18 months

is a testament to what's possible when teams collaborate with a clear vision and shared purpose. This project is about making sure every call for help is answered with speed, precision, and care. Bringing services back into the county was a decisive move to put Suffolk's residents and public value at the heart of emergency response. The new control room features advanced dispatch technology, upgraded communications systems, and enhanced data sharing capabilities – ensuring faster, smarter coordination during emergencies.

New council proposals mean 3 councils, 3 sets of salaries and the same old story

District and borough councils' new boundary proposals criticised as costly and unworkable. Creating 3 new councils in Suffolk would lead to increased costs and carry safeguarding risks. Under their suggested boundaries, Ipswich would form a unitary council with Hadleigh, Kesgrave and Felixstowe (known as South Suffolk); Bury St Edmunds would be grouped with Sudbury, Haverhill, Newmarket and Brandon (known as West Suffolk) and Lowestoft would find itself with Woodbridge, Eye and Stowmarket (known as East Suffolk). Alongside the map, the districts and borough have not released any information of what impact these proposed boundaries would have on council tax rates – with Ipswich residents currently paying the highest rate of district or borough council tax in the whole country. Cllr Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for devolution, local government reform and NSIPs, said: "We have been asking the district councils for their proposed council boundaries since March. Given what they've released today, I can see why they've kept them secret for so long. Their proposals are chaotic, confusing, and ultimately unworkable. They will mean higher council tax across the county, but particularly in places like Felixstowe, Hadleigh, Kesgrave the villages south of Ipswich and the Shotley peninsula, more money spent on senior staff and administration and less money going on frontline local services in Suffolk. The financial figures that the districts and borough are putting forward are optimistic to the point of being dangerous. We must never lose sight of the fact that the key care services we deliver support some of the most vulnerable people in our community. Spurious assumptions to support an argument to protect their perceived political fiefdoms have no place in this debate. Breaking up key expensive care services, that are currently delivered county wide, won't just cost more as they employ new senior teams, it will put the most vulnerable in our community at risk. They will create a postcode lottery for care, drive up costs and create boundaries where they don't currently exist. The districts and borough have finally published their plans, but what they have brought forward just means three sets of salaries and the same old story from local government. I remain as convinced as ever that One Suffolk is the only solution with the best interest of Suffolk's residents at its heart.

Protecting Suffolk's thatched treasures from fire

There's something timeless about a thatched roof. They bring character to our villages, charm to our countryside, and a sense of heritage that makes Suffolk such a beautiful place to live. In fact, thatching is enjoying a revival, with more homeowners choosing to restore or preserve these traditional roofs. But while thatched homes are picturesque, they also come with some very particular risks. Sadly, we've seen a couple of thatch fires in Suffolk in recent weeks - stark reminders that once a blaze takes hold, it spreads rapidly through the thatch and is extremely difficult to put out. Too often, the result is devastating and can cause irreparable damage to a home. The good news is there's a lot you can do to protect yourself. Prevention is the best defence, and by taking some sensible precautions you can dramatically reduce the chances of a fire breaking out.

Chimneys: your first line of defence

Most thatch fires begin in the chimney. That's why regular maintenance is so important. Get your chimney swept by a qualified professional at least once a year, and more often if you use it regularly. Look out for warning signs such as staining on plasterwork, soot in the loft, or deposits on the chimney breast - these may mean something is wrong. Structural improvements can make a big difference too. Raising the height of your chimney, adding a pot, or lining the flue will all help stop

sparks or heat from reaching the thatch. As a rule of thumb, the top of your chimney pot should be at least 1.8 metres above the thatch. Extra distance means extra safety. Always seek advice from a qualified chimney engineer before making changes.

Fires and wood burners

If you enjoy an open fire or wood burner, a few simple habits will keep you safer. Only burn well-seasoned wood, damp logs release moisture and gases that create tar inside your chimney, which is highly flammable. Use a stove pipe thermometer to make sure your burner is running at the right temperature - too hot and sparks can escape, too cool and you risk dangerous build-ups of soot and tar. Never use petrol or paraffin to start a fire and always use a fire guard. Before going to bed or leaving the house, make sure the fire is fully extinguished. And remember - children should never be left unattended near open flames.

Electrical safety

Electrical faults are another common cause of fires in thatched homes. Don't overload sockets and unplug chargers once you have finished with them. Avoid charging laptops or phones overnight. Look out for flickering lights, scorch marks, or loose wiring, and have your system checked periodically by a qualified electrician.

Bonfires, fireworks, and contractors

If you live under thatch, steer clear of bonfires, fireworks, and sky lanterns - they are simply too risky. It's also worth reminding your neighbours about this, as their actions could put your home in danger. When having building work done, set some ground rules with contractors. Tools like blowtorches and heat guns should never be used anywhere near a thatched roof - all it takes is a single spark in the wrong place to cause catastrophe.

Kitchen safety

Two thirds of house fires begin in the kitchen. The advice here applies to everyone, but it's especially important in a thatched home. Keep flammable items like tea towels away from hobs, never overfill chip pans, and keep a fire blanket nearby.

Alarms and escape plans

Smoke alarms save lives, but only if they're installed in the right places and kept in working order. Fit alarms on every floor of your home, including the loft space, and test them weekly. Ten-year battery alarms are a good option. In addition, make sure you have a clear fire escape plan. Talk it through with your family so everyone knows what to do and how to get out quickly if the worst happens.

Help is at hand

Owning a thatched property is something to be proud of but keeping it safe requires a little extra care. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service offers free home safety visits, tailored to thatched homes, where we can help you spot risks and make changes that keep you safe.

To book your visit, call our Prevention Team on 01473 260588. It could save not just your home, but your life.

Together, we can continue to protect Suffolk's unique character and ensure our rural communities remain safe and resilient. You can find out more about thatched property safety on our website: www.suffolk.gov.uk.

Matthew Hicks - County Councillor for the Thredling Division

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