

July 2025 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Council reorganisation affects us all - so have your say today

A new survey giving residents the opportunity to shape the future of councils and public services in Suffolk has been launched. It's part of the Government plan to reshape and streamline councils in Suffolk to save money, reduce confusion and improve public services for residents.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for devolution, local government reform and NSIPs, said: "It's fairly well known that we strongly believe that replacing Suffolk's six local authorities with a single new council would be smarter, simpler and better for our county. We've arrived where we have because early figures show it's the only way to save money, improve services and keep your council tax as low as possible. But that doesn't mean our proposal is the finished product. We want our plan to improve residents' connection with their local council and we'd like their help to ensure that's the case. A key part of this work is finding out what people think about the state of local government in Suffolk – and what their hopes are for the future. After all, it's their council tax and services so what they think is vitally important. This survey will help us to develop our plan so that we can be confident it addresses the issues that matter most to you. I'd therefore encourage all Suffolk residents to take a moment to have their say."

The survey only takes about 10 minutes to complete, and can be done online at www.suffolk.gov.uk/devolution, by emailing devolution@suffolk.gov.uk or by calling 0345 603 1842 where a member of Suffolk County Council's customer services team can help residents to complete the survey. People can also visit any of Suffolk's 45 libraries to complete the survey online. It asks questions about local democracy – such as how you raise issues that need addressing, local decision making – such as how you might want to get involved and about the specifics of council reorganisation itself. The survey is open until 4 August 2025.

The survey will play a part in helping SCC to develop a comprehensive business plan that looks at the best way to organise councils and deliver public services in Suffolk – so that the Government has all the information it needs to decide which proposal(s) to put out to public consultation. From best practice elsewhere in the country to the costs of various options currently on the table, no stone is being left unturned. Whilst a final proposal is still to be developed, Suffolk County Council believes that a new single local council is the smartest, simplest, and best option for the whole of Suffolk which will deliver the biggest savings and most sustainable service improvements. The council argues that any alternatives will have to work hard to justify the risks of breaking up critical services like social care, creating new council boundaries and smaller population sizes. Early analysis by financial consultants PwC suggests that establishing a single new local council could cost around £19 million but that this could be repaid quickest through the significant financial savings achieved by having one council. Alternatively, the cost of breaking Suffolk into two or even three – as proposed by Suffolk's district and borough councils - would cost £7 million to £13 million more and, in the case of three new councils, that investment would never be repaid as there would be no savings to be found. If we want our new structure to retain key local services and to be truly accessible, then the new council or councils needs to be able to afford to do so. Breaking Suffolk up would place such financial pressure on new councils that those small, discretionary local services we all value would be at risk from day one. To create a truly sustainable and effective council structure for Suffolk, one new council is not just the only viable option, but also the best one.

Suffolk Libraries Became Suffolk Community Libraries from 1 June

The service will continue to operate as usual, with no changes for library users and all 45 libraries will remain open. This ensures the council can continue delivering library services in a sustainable way, strengthening the role libraries play across Suffolk's communities. This move is not just about preserving the service we have; it's about making libraries even more integral to the services we offer. While they already provide excellent spaces for reading and community engagement, we want to expand their role and ensure they become vital access points for a wide range of public services.

We're incredibly grateful to Suffolk Libraries and all their dedicated staff for everything they've done, and for working closely with us to ensure a smooth transition. We value their expertise and passion, and we look forward to working with them as they become Suffolk County Council staff. Suffolk County Council extends its sincere thanks to everyone involved in the transition and looks forward to this new chapter for library services in Suffolk. For more information, please visit www.suffolkcommunitylibraries.co.uk

Suffolk challenges Government on Planning reform

The Council and other speakers raised concerns that proposed changes to the NSIP regime were not suitably robust to manage the significant changes which NSIPs can bring to host communities, particularly with the proposed replacement of a statutory duty for pre-submission consultation with statutory guidance. Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs, said: "I'm proud that SCC continues to lead the way with its NSIP expertise and influence and can bring together colleagues and speakers from around the country. Suffolk has one of the greatest concentrations of NSIPs in the UK, and for me it's important to ensure that local communities are considered first-and-foremost by local authorities, project promoters and government. Today there were some robust discussions around government's proposals to scrap the statutory duty to consult for NSIPs. This is something that the county council fundamentally disagrees with - our communities need more and better consultation, not less. We welcome any opportunity to further engage with Government to share our expertise as to what meaningful engagement should look like."

Delegates from across the country attended the Conference to hear speakers from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), legal experts, and industry leaders discussing the emerging Planning and Infrastructure Bill, effective communication with project promoters, and the importance of local impact reports. The conference further cements Suffolk County Council's recognised role as a Centre of Excellence for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) for its expertise when engaging with projects, such as Sizewell C, the Gull Wing, National Grid upgrades, solar farms and offshore wind farms.

Set Sail on a Journey Through Suffolk's Maritime Past with Suffolk Archives

Running from 27 June to 27 September at The Hold in Ipswich, the exhibition explores Suffolk's deep connections to the sea from smuggling and sea rescues to shipbuilding, coastal communities, and historic ports. This free exhibition features fascinating contributions from local museums and organisations including the Felixstowe and Offshore Radio Group, Ipswich School, East Anglian Traditional Arts Centre, Lowestoft Maritime Museum, and the RNLi Archives. It is supported by Associated British Ports. We are delighted to host this fascinating exhibition, which shines a light on Suffolk's proud and diverse maritime heritage. It's a wonderful opportunity for communities across the county to come together, learn, and celebrate the stories that helped shape our coastal identity. To accompany the exhibition, Suffolk Archives has launched a packed programme of talks, walks, workshops, and family events offering something for curious minds of all ages. Young explorers can dive into storytelling adventures with The Yarnsmith of Norwich, Grethe Jensen, and Hannah Brailsford, who will bring to life tales of sea monsters, pirates, treasure and more. Families can also drop anchor at Let's Get Crafty workshops taking place at The Hold in Ipswich and at venues across the county including Newmarket's National Horse Racing Museum, Haverhill Library, Stowmarket Library, Lowestoft Library, Eye Library, and Moyse's Hall in Bury St Edmunds. These creative sessions are a fun and engaging way to explore maritime myths and legends. So, whether you're a seasoned history buff or just looking for a fun family day out, chart a course to Suffolk Archives this summer where there's something for everyone to discover. For more information and event listings, visit www.suffolkarchives.co.uk.

Matthew Hicks - County Councillor for the Thredling Division

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