

County Council report – September 2024

New Europa Way link road in Ipswich gets start date

Works to build a new link road at Europa Way, connecting Sproughton Road with Bramford Road in Ipswich will begin on 9 September.

This scheme will include extending the existing Europa Way Road to create the link road. This new section of road will include an off-road footpath and cycle path, with a new mini roundabout being built to connect the new extension of Europa Way to Bramford Road.

The scheme brings many benefits for residents and aims to:

- Improve the transport network's reliability and safety
- Improve connectivity for sustainable transport modes such as pedestrians, cyclists and bus services
- Support Suffolk's economy by unlocking employment creation opportunities and planned growth
- Achieve a balanced development by installing green features to help avoid putting additional pressure on the surrounding environment, such as installing Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to manage surface water runoff

The construction work is programmed to commence on 9 September 2024 with the aim to complete the works and open the new link road by the end of April 2025.

The work will be carried out in phases and will use various traffic management methods for each phase. This is essential for the safety of road users, residents and our team.

To facilitate construction, temporary parking restrictions will be placed along part of Bramford Road. Suffolk Highways requests that vehicles are relocated from the marked area whilst the works are carried out.

Temporary traffic lights and pedestrian crossing points will be the main method of traffic management used during works on Bramford Road. Towards the end of the work, it may be necessary for part of Bramford Road to be closed. Full details will be confirmed later.

Solar Together launches in Suffolk

Residents of Suffolk can come together to invest in renewable energy sources through a group-buying scheme for solar panels and battery storage. Solar Together Suffolk helps homeowners feel confident that they are paying the right price for a high-quality installation from qualified installers.

Suffolk residents can join the group-buying scheme, which offers solar panels with optional battery storage and EV charge points, as well as retrofit battery storage for residents who have already invested in solar panels and are looking to get more from the renewable energy they generate. The scheme allows homeowners to increase their independence from the national grid.

It's free to register here, and there is no obligation to go ahead with an installation. Suffolk's councils are working in partnership with iChoosr, experts in sustainable energy transition, to make the transition to clean energy as cost-effective and hassle-free as possible.

How does it work?

- Householders can register online to become part of the group for free and without obligation at solartogether.co.uk/suffolk
- Approved UK solar PV suppliers participate in a reverse auction. They can offer competitive pricing as the volume and geographic concentration makes it possible for them to realise greater efficiencies, which they pass on with lower prices for installations.
- After the auction, registered households will be emailed a personal recommendation which is specific to the details they submitted in their registration.
- If they choose to accept their recommendation, the specifics of their installation will be confirmed with a technical survey after which a date can be set for the installation of their solar PV system.
- Telephone and email helpdesks are on-hand throughout the whole process which, together with information sessions, will allow households to make an informed decision in a safe and hassle-free environment.

Sunnica challenge ends as two councils pull out

Judicial review proceedings from four local councils against the Sunnica solar farm project will not be pursued after West Suffolk Council and Cambridgeshire County Council chose to withdraw from the process.

Suffolk County Council had written to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Rt Hon. Ed Miliband MP, regarding his decision to approve the Sunnica solar farm.

The pre-action protocol letter was the first step in potential judicial review proceedings against the Sunnica solar farm project, in a bid to secure appropriate funding for work that the council will have to do because of the scheme.

The council believes that, in his haste to approve the application in just a matter of days, the Secretary of State ignored the council's funding arguments.

The new Secretary of State has shown scant regard for the communities affected, and for the local authorities who must pick up considerable amounts of additional work because of the project.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

“We must not forget that this is the worst scheme we have ever dealt with, and the developer has, to date, shown no interest in properly meeting our costs or properly engaging with local communities...”

“This will mean that the developer, Sunnica, only has to pay a minimal amount to cover costs that will be forced upon the council, as a result of their project going ahead.”

This comes at a time when local authorities are having to make difficult financial decisions across all service areas, to prioritise supporting the most vulnerable in their communities, through adult social care and SEND.

Suffolk County Council and East Cambridgeshire District Council remained committed to seeing through the legal challenge but were left in an impossible position to continue.

With West Suffolk Council and Cambridgeshire County Council abandoning the process, the cost of legal fees for the two remaining councils versus the likely financial return in a successful outcome was no longer a justifiable use of public funds.

Although both councils still had the desire to take things forward, the loss of two councils in the group action is damaging to the process.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

“We are deeply disappointed by West Suffolk Council and Cambridgeshire County Council choosing not to challenge the outrageous decision by the government to approve the Sunnica solar farm that spans our two counties.

“The Sunnica solar farm was approved by the new government against the recommendation of the independent Planning Inspectorate, who said it should be thrown out. In pulling out of this challenge, the two councils have demonstrated they are intent on serving the interests of the government over the interests of local communities and taxpayers.

“Those councils may suggest now going cap in hand to the developer but that has little chance of success. We must not forget that this is the worst scheme we have ever dealt with, and the developer has, to date, shown no interest in properly meeting our costs or properly engaging with local communities.”

Councillor Anna Bailey, Leader of East Cambridgeshire District Council, said:

“I am unbelievably disappointed with the decisions of Cambridgeshire County Council and West Suffolk Council to pull out of the Group action. They have expended public funds, the legal position has not changed, and yet they are now refusing to finish what we started. What a waste and what a let-down for residents.

“Now local taxpayers are going to have to foot the bill for the costs to the councils of this unwanted, appalling development; Cambridgeshire County Council and West Suffolk Council have seriously let the side down by allowing that to stand without challenge.

“There is still a long way to go with this application and the developer still has a huge mountain to climb before they send in the diggers to the food production fields of rural East Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. East Cambridgeshire District Council will work to do all it can to mitigate the impact of this development, secure local benefits and to stand by its residents.”

All four councils had earlier received a response from the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Rt Hon. Ed Miliband MP, to their pre-action protocol letter in a bid to secure appropriate funding.

That reply outlined the government’s position to defend their decision to grant permission for the Sunnica project. The councils maintain their position that the Secretary of State made a legal error but cannot now test the case in court.

Two Suffolk flood investigation reports published in latest response to Storm Babet

The investigations into the flooding which occurred in Needham Market and Wickham Market during October 2023 have analysed what caused these events and recommend what could be done to alleviate flooding there in the future.

In Needham Market, over 45 residential and commercial properties were internally flooded. In Wickham Market, it was 40 properties. In both communities, infrastructure and services were disrupted.

The investigations found that the areas were severely impacted by flooding due to the intensity of rainfall that overwhelmed the natural flow routes and the capacity of watercourses and drainage infrastructure. This situation was compounded when overland flow paths converged with the water from rivers that had burst their banks.

Key recommendations for both areas, which include short-, medium- and long-term proposals aimed at individual homeowners, community groups, landowners and Risk Management Authorities, include:

- Implementing community flood plans
- Maximising use of grants available to make properties more resilient to flooding
- Removing blockages in watercourses and drains (private and publicly owned)

- Investigating potential improvements to drainage infrastructure (private and publicly owned)
- Creating new natural flood management features (e.g.: storage ponds and planting that ‘slows the flow’ of flood water)
- Further modelling to better understand flooding within the location (Wickham Market only).

These actions could help mitigate local flood risk.