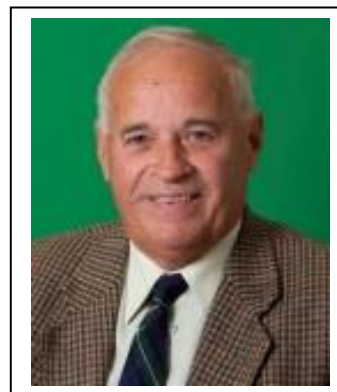


Parish Report March 2026

Councillor

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Information Updates

Cost of Living help and advice:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/family.page?familychannel=6>

Benefits advice and support:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/adult.page?adultchannel=0>

Flood preparation advice: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolk-fire-and-rescue-service/fire-and-rescue-safety-advice-in-the-community/preparing-for-flooding>

Flood recovery advice and support: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>

Local elections in May 2026 Reinstated

At the end of January, the government announced that a number of local elections around the country would be postponed, where councils had written to them saying it would be helpful for delivery of Local Government Reorganization (LGR).

This included Suffolk County Council's elections, which were due to be held on Thursday 7 May 2026. However, following legal challenge, the government has reversed its plans and has now announced that county council elections – as well as those due to be held by Ipswich Borough Council – will take place as originally planned.

New councillors elected in May will hold office until the new unitary authority/ies are vested in 2028, with councillors for the new unitary authority/ies elected in 2027 and 'shadowing' the existing councillors for a year.

The government is due to make an announcement by the end of March on how many unitary councils will be set up in Suffolk.

Changes at the Top

On 13 February, it was announced that Nicola Beach, the Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council, would be leaving her role. Nicola has been Chief Executive since 2018 when she replaced Deborah Cadman, and will be stepping down at the end of March 2026.

The council proposes to appoint two existing directors – Andrew Cook and Mark Ash – into new joint chief executive roles for the remaining two years of the council's existence. As these directors' existing posts would not be recruited into, the number of senior staff at the council will reduce by one, saving up to £92k a year.

This decision must be ratified by councillors at the next meeting of full council on 19 March 2026.

Vehicle Removal Trial for Resurfacing Works

Suffolk Highways have announced that they will trial removing vehicles that have not been removed for planned resurfacing works.

The council plans to make sure that residents are made aware at least two weeks in advance of any works, with cards placed under windscreens and put through residents' doors. Two days before the works are due to begin, cones will be put out along with signage to say when the works are due to begin. If there are still cars parked on the road on the day works are due to start, officers will knock on doors to try and find the owner to move it, but as a last resort, vehicles will be moved, ideally nearby where they are still in sight, but if this is not possible, they may be moved to a facility in Bury St Edmunds with a £70 fine issued.

As with other Penalty Charge Notices, the amount payable is halved if the fine is paid promptly. Although it has long had the power to remove vehicles for planned works, until now Suffolk County Council has not exercised it – compared to Essex County Council, for example, who have been doing this for about a decade.

This approach will be adopted by the council for a period between March to June 2026 initially, with a report prepared on the trial and making recommendations for the future.

Energy, Water, Transport, Commercial and Adaptive Infrastructure Policy

At Cabinet on Tuesday 24 February, revisions to the council's Energy and Climate Adaptive Infrastructure Policy were approved, including a change in the name of the policy to the Energy, Water, Transport, Commercial and Adaptive Infrastructure Policy.

This policy details how the council will respond to large developments such as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), solar farms and data centres that may be attached to them, and changes to road systems in the county that may be needed following the projects. Suffolk County Council is a consultee on NSIP proposals, but it is not the decision-maker, and the policy sets out how the council will respond to such consultations, such as protecting best and most versatile agricultural land for food production, wellbeing of local communities where projects are disruptive and especially where there is cumulative impact of multiple projects, such as the coastal area around Sizewell C.

The policy notes that solar farms may soon have data centres attached, so the council needs to have an agreed approach for developments that are large scale and energy-intensive. The policy also sets out that Suffolk County Council expects developers proposing projects to fund Planning Performance Agreements – this means that responding to the all the proposals for these developments does not come out of the council's budget.

Suffolk Sustainability Initiatives Nominated for Awards

Suffolk County Council has been nominated for a national award for its work on energy and sustainability. Only 24 local authorities in the UK have been shortlisted for the first APSE Energy Awards, which are held in partnership with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

The awards celebrate innovation and the role local authorities play in responding to the challenges of energy transition, climate change and long-term sustainability. The 'Accessing & Managing Finance' category recognises Suffolk County Council's Warm Homes Suffolk Loan Scheme (administered by Lendology CIC), and the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders group's Home Energy Efficiency Assessment Scheme (administered by Reed In Partnership).

The loan scheme offers an interest-free loan to make energy efficient improvements, such as insulation, solar panels or heat pumps. Through countywide Sustainable Suffolk initiatives, the county is also up for a second award, in the 'Working in Collaboration' category which involves a range of projects such as a study into supporting taxi drivers to move to electric vehicles, and launching the Suffolk Sustainable Schools Network.

You can find out more about these initiatives here: <https://sustainablesuffolk.org.uk/>

Joint Chief Executives recommended for appointment

Suffolk County Council will be asked to approve the appointment of two of its existing executive directors to new joint chief executive roles which will save the council money.

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 which met earlier today.

The county council's chief executive of eight years, Nicola Beach, is to leave her post at the end of March 2026, with Mark and Andrew set to take on their new roles from 1 April 2026 following a structured handover.

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.

The council's constitution requires it to have a designated head of paid service, responsible for leading the council's employees as they deliver services to residents. Significant uncertainty in the local authority chief executive recruitment market has led to many county councils, including Leicestershire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Essex and Hampshire all making internal appointments in recent months, having advertised the roles externally.

New SEND school and centre of excellence to be built in Bury St Edmunds

A new special school for Bury St Edmunds has been given the go-ahead.

Run by Eastern Education Group and funded by the Department for Education, the school in Glastonbury Road will provide 90 places for students aged 14 to 19-years-old with special educational needs and disabilities.

In a first for Suffolk, the new school will also become a centre of excellence and hub for SEND guidance, offering expertise to mainstream schools. Examples of this approach include providing outreach staff to work with mainstream schools and offering specialist expertise and training opportunities.

This hub model is increasingly encouraged by the Department for Education and is reflected in guidance from Ofsted around inclusive practice and system leadership. It launches Suffolk County Council's ambition to implement this model across the county with a number of other education settings.

This news comes just a week after it was announced that Suffolk County Council and Unity Schools Partnership will open a new SEND school in Saxmundham for 126 students with severe learning difficulties.

Both new provisions have been agreed by Suffolk County Council in line with its SEND sufficiency plans, which outline how specialist provision should be delivered across the county.

This new special school in Bury St Edmunds will share a site with Chalk Hill School special school which is due to open in Easter 2026. Chalk Hill will occupy the former Horringer Middle School building, while the second school will be built by the Department for Education on a field on the site. Eastern Education Group will run both schools.

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

Thirty-seven arts organisations, museums and community groups across Suffolk have been awarded funding through Suffolk County Council's £500,000 Culture Project Fund, now in its second year.

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. Among the projects funded are:

- Frame the Future at DanceEast an eight-week creative intervention using hip hop dance and film to support young people at risk of exclusion in Ipswich. Delivered in partnership with schools and specialist artists, it aims to build confidence, skills and wellbeing through co-creation.
- The Mid-Suffolk Light Railway Museum has secured funding to refurbish its accessible railway carriage, maintaining inclusive access for wheelchair users, families and visitors with additional needs, while supporting volunteer-led heritage restoration skills.
- The Bloom Community Engagement Programme, delivered by Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds, offers year-round participatory theatre and workshops across West Suffolk, including youth theatre, SEND provision, over-55s sessions and an annual Bloom Festival to strengthen community connections.

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.

One example was Status Creative CIC's *Creative Connections* in Lowestoft, which brought together people with lived experience of domestic abuse through creative writing, poetry and music workshops in a safe, supportive space. Participants reported improved wellbeing, stronger social connections and renewed confidence.

Another was Woodbridge Tide Mill Charitable Trust's Tide Mill Museum 3D Tour, which created an immersive online experience featuring 42 learning points, videos and audio content, enabling people worldwide, including those unable to travel to explore the historic mill year-round.

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 organisation receiving funding can be found here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/cultureprojectfund>

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Website - [Suffolk Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent Group – The GLI Group at Suffolk County Council \(suffolkgli.wordpress.com\)](#)