A Report for Little Cornard Parish Council Meeting on 20th January 2026
From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley

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➢ Suffolk secures more than £26 million bus funding over three years – 2026-2029

Millions of pounds of investment is to take place in Suffolk's bus network over three years following allocation of Government funding. Services, ticketing, and infrastructure will all benefit under the package worth nearly £27 million between 2026 and 2029.

Suffolk County Council will receive a total of £26,813760 under the Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG). This funding will enable the continuation and expansion of new and improved services introduced over the past two years through LABG support and its predecessor, the Bus Services Improvement Grant (BSIP), many of which were shaped by community feedback.

The funding is split into two areas. – Revenue and Capital. Revenue investment will focus on:

- Maintaining and growing enhanced services based on local suggestions.
- Increasing publicity and travel information to help residents make informed choices.

Capital funding will deliver:

- Renewal and expansion of Real Time Passenger Information across Suffolk.
- Improved ticketing options and accessibility in partnership with bus operators.
- Investigations into bus priority measures to reduce journey times and encourage modal shift.
- Upgraded bus stops with new shelters, better footway links, and accessibility enhancements—many suggested by local communities.

➢ Project Celebrating Disability in Suffolk gets £139k grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund

The project has been made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we will honour the resilience and contributions of people with disabilities, while also helping wider communities better understand the barriers they face today.

Beyond Labels will collect and preserve personal stories, alongside the histories of organisations, schools, and charities that support disabled people to create a record that celebrates disability while sparking conversations about inclusion, accessibility, and equality.

This exciting initiative begins with the recruitment of a dedicated project officer and volunteers, the launch of a community forum, and a programme of activities designed to capture and share lived experiences.

As part of the project, Suffolk Archives, a Suffolk County Council service, will work with local schools and community groups, offering free workshops that teach skills in recording,

➢ Firefighter applications surge as Suffolk boosts female representation

Applications to join Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have surged by 32% compared to last year, highlighting a growing interest in a career that makes a real difference to local communities. This year's recruitment drive also saw a significant increase in female representation among successful candidates, with women making up 17.2% of the recruitment pool compared to 11.7% last year, which represents a 38% rise. Recruitment outcomes at a glance:

- Applications up 32% from 2024 (389 vs 280).
- Female representation in the recruitment pool has increased from 11.7% to 17.2% – a 38% rise.
- 345 candidates progressed to the first stage of assessment.
- 203 advanced to the second stage and were assessed against the National Fire Chiefs Council Leadership Framework and the Code of Ethics - 116 passed.
- 88 were members of the public; 28 were existing on call firefighters.
- Following firefighter-specific aptitude and fitness tests, 100 candidates were then interviewed at SFRS Headquarters at Endeavour House, Ipswich.

➢ Council fears Sunnica is to become a 'Trojan horse' for new large infrastructure projects

Sunnica Ltd is a joint venture between Tribus Clean Energy and PS Renewables. They are hoping to extend the provision in their agreed planning permission, to secure 'future value-adding flexibility', as stated in their letter to government:

"To provide the Scheme with sufficient future value-adding flexibility in relation to adjacent land that may be subject to planning applications in conjunction with the Scheme."

These changes would enable them to integrate future proposed developments that come forward, by allowing local planning applications to overlap with the entire boundaries of the Sunnica scheme.

It means that new, vast projects such as data centres **could cover many hectares of land,** on top of that covered by the already-agreed solar panels, battery storage and associated infrastructure.

A consultation on these proposed changes will begin in due course. However, while the proposal sets out a limited number of consultees, it is very important to recognise that any relevant party will be able to respond. ,

Since this article was published, Sunnica Ltd has announced that it does not intend to proceed with the change concerning the 'future value-adding flexibility'. The consultation will solely focus on the amended Order Limits surrounding Burwell substation.

➢ Seasoned political journalist, Paul Geater, backs One Suffolk

A political journalist with over 40 years' experience scrutinising and reporting on councils in Suffolk has backed the plan to scrap the county's six councils and replace them with one authority delivering all local and county wide services. Suffolk-born Paul Geater, who currently presents a current affairs radio talk show on Suffolk Sound but previously spent decades as a political correspondent for the East Anglian Daily Times and Ipswich Star, said:

"I started off by thinking the three councils option was probably going to be the best [but], the more I have heard, the more I have looked into this, the more convinced I have been that the One Suffolk option is the only real sensible choice for the government. "I am highly sceptical about the financial claims both sides have made about this. [But] I am much more sceptical about the claims from the three councils, I just don't see how their proposals can achieve the kind of savings the government is talking about.

"It comes down to a few things. First of all, Suffolk has an identity and has had an identity for more than a millennium. I don't think I come from Ipswich and South Suffolk, Suffolk has its own identity. I was born and brought up in the East of Suffolk… I lived for a time and worked for a time in Bury St Edmunds in West Suffolk. It is all Suffolk to me and I think that identity is very important.

"When you look at how the proposed splitting is being done, frankly the three Suffolk people seem to be using a kind of geographical gymnastics to try to equalise figures in all kinds of places and it really does develop something of a dog's breakfast of a map. Stowmarket has absolutely nothing to do with Lowestoft, it looks to either Ipswich or Bury St Edmunds and yet the idea is that local government should be run for Stowmarket from Lowestoft. It doesn't make any sense. It just looks to be as if you're building in duplication. "*I have filled in my consultation form and said that as a reporter who spent 40 years covering local government in this county that my feeling is the only solution for Suffolk is to have one council for the county."*

➢ **Virtual Fostering and Adoption Sessions for the Stour Valley**

Fostering is a flexible role with options for short term care from a weekend a month to longer term opportunities, all providing life-changing support for local children. If you want to find out more about what it's like to foster or adopt with us, please call a member of the team on 01473 264800

➢ My Priorities

Education - Supporting Vulnerable People - Jobs and Growth - Localism and the Stour Valley - Building on Suffolk's Strength all underpinned by strong financial management and fair council tax.