A Report for Little Cornard Parish Council Meeting on 17th March 2026
From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley

Tel: 01206 262993 (change) Mobile 07545 423796 Email: james.finch@suffolk.gov.uk

➢ One Suffolk plan revealed saving Suffolk £39.4 million a year with more local services with Local Government Re-organisation.

Millions of pounds of public money would be saved and reinvested in frontline services and benefits for the whole of Suffolk, if the Government backs a new plan published today (Monday 8 September).

The ambitious proposal will see all of Suffolk's six councils abolished and replaced with one new unitary council - which would deliver both local and county-wide services.

The One Suffolk business case demonstrates that a single unitary for Suffolk will save £78.2 million after the first five years, while three councils would cost an eye-watering £145.3 million more than the current two-tier system. After the first five years, one council would save £39.4 million a year, whereas three would cost £13.1 million more than the current model. The business case is built on rigorous financial analysis of Suffolk-based data conducted by global advisory firm Grant Thornton, rather than generic national modelling.

One Suffolk would have the capacity to create real improvements to council services which would benefit everyone, including:

- Improved financial resilience, enabling the unitary council to free up resources for frontline services and keep council tax as low as possible.
- Harmonising Council Tax to the lowest level across Suffolk. Based on current levels this would result in Band D properties seeing a reduction of £245 in Ipswich, £17 in East Suffolk, £29 in West Suffolk, £19 in Babergh and a freeze in Mid Suffolk.
- A new deal for market towns, including Ipswich, backed by a £40m capital investment fund, and a review of car parking charges and markets conducted in consultation with traders, businesses and representative bodies.
- *Empowering communities by offering powers and funding to town and parish councils where these councils express a desire for additional responsibilities. Creating a new town council for Ipswich to enhance democratic representation*.
- A proactive and revitalised highways service that says 'yes' more - acting swiftly, communicating clearly and delivering more.
- *Creating a unified planning framework that delivers greater consistency, efficiency, and strategic alignment across Suffolk, paired with local planning committees so decisions are made close to home.*
- Leveraging technology and innovation to create a modern council prepared for future challenges.
- Building a strong, flourishing, and resilient local economy that serves all residents, businesses, and communities.
- A stronger voice for Suffolk through effective collaboration with the new mayor, focusing on clear investment priorities that maximise benefits.

The One Suffolk campaign engaged communities from across Suffolk, with 8,189 responses to our Residents' Survey. This made it the largest survey response rate for the county council in the past decade.

Immediately after a Full Council meeting, the Council's Cabinet approved the One Suffolk Business Plan on 16 September and submitted it to Government on 26 September. Government Ministers will be then deciding later this year which proposals to put out to public consultation, before making their final decision in early 2026 ?? March 2026. The response from the Government is still awaited at the time of printing.

This is the Business Case – Executive summary and the full report.: One Suffolk Business Case

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

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.

➢ Suffolk County Council's chief executive, Nicola Beach to step down

Nicola will leave at the end of March 2026 and the process to appoint a new chief executive will begin shortly.

Reflecting on her decision, Nicola said:

"Serving the people of Suffolk has been a great privilege and I am immensely proud of what has been achieved together over the last eight years. Leaving this job has not been an easy decision, and I have thought long and hard about it. However, I believe this is the right time to hand over leadership to those who can steer and support colleagues through local government reorganisation over the next two years, whatever option the Government decides to implement.

"I would like to thank all of my colleagues, Matthew Hicks and his Cabinet and all councillors for their support and I wish them the very best for the future. I do not have another role lined up – I am simply looking forward to a new change of pace and lifestyle, enjoying this wonderful county and taking time to travel and see family and friends."

Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:
"Nicola has led the council through an important period of change and achievement. She is very well-regarded, hardworking and has an exception knowledge of the complexity of public service, plus an unfaltering desire to deliver the best services for the people of Suffolk – the county that she loves.

"Under her tenure and with strong political leadership, Suffolk County Council is well positioned to rise to the challenge and opportunity of local government reorganisation. Her legacy will be enduring and deeply felt. I want to thank her for her outstanding leadership and dedication, and I wish her all the best for the future.

➢ New Suffolk Exhibition Shines a Light on Disability

Beyond Labels explores themes of visibility, independent living, discrimination, and making change happen. Understand how national campaigns, and social and political changes have impacted lives in Suffolk. As well as discovering the histories of organisations, schools, and charities that work with and support local disabled people.

Made possible by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, this exhibition is co-curated by local community groups and Suffolk Archives and has enabled communities to share and celebrate their lived experience. Beyond Labels celebrates disability while sparking conversations about accessibility, equality, and the work that's still needed.

The exhibition will explore local stories such as the actions taken by parents after their children were labelled "uneducable" following the Education Act 1944.

Lived experience of disability is more and less visible in the historical record at different points in time. Wartime experiences are highlighted in a range of archival records, covering topics such as shell shock, or PTSD, long term health conditions, and individual stories such as that of Frederick Pigeon. Frederick was wounded during World War One, had his right leg amputated and was later fitted for an artificial limb. After the war he settled in Blythburgh where he married Ellen.

Coming up to present day the exhibition will explore hidden disabilities which are not always visible but have an impact on an individual's day-to-day life, promoting awareness and understanding.

➢ Public's chance to try the ADASTRA trial driverless shuttle

Residents across Suffolk are being invited to see for themselves how self-driving shuttle technology could shape the future of local travel — and to have their say on how it should work for their communities.

Suffolk County Council is holding two events where the public can ride on the ADASTRA prototype, ask questions and share their views. The council wants to understand not just whether autonomous shuttles are acceptable, but how they could best serve local needs as part of the wider transport system.
The events take place at:

- Mildenhall Hub, Sheldrick Way, Mildenhall IP28 7JX
  9.30am–2pm, Saturday 7 February 2026

- East Point Pavilion, Royal Plain, Lowestoft NR33 0AP
  10am–2pm, Saturday 28 February 2026

The council has been working with design experts Smart City Consultancy to assess the technical, operational, and regulatory requirements of incorporating autonomous shuttle services into a potential future network of mobility hubs across the county.

Shuttles could potentially link future residential developments with strategic bus routes, improve accessibility, and support sustainable transport especially in rural areas.

Shuttles could travel shorter routes to feed main bus and train service corridors where the frequency of buses and trains could be increased, and journey times can be shorter.

Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council Cabinet member for Transport Strategy, said: "Autonomous vehicles are not trying to replace cars, they are a means to fix specific, expensive gaps in transportation.

➢ 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.