

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – JANUARY 2024



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

- **NATIONAL GRID COULD CAUSE UNNECESSARY DISRUPTION TO SUFFOLK COMMUNITIES**

Suffolk County Council remains concerned at the lack of coordination between huge energy projects which would affect coastal communities in Suffolk. In particular, the council believes National Grid should be taking more collective responsibility for its projects, such as with the Sea Link and LionLink schemes. If left unchallenged, these projects could have a significant impact on Suffolk communities.

Sea Link is a proposal for the development of a new 2 gigawatt electricity connection, approximately 140km in length and predominately offshore. LionLink aims to connect multiple offshore wind farms in the North Sea, instead of individual wind farms connecting one-by-one to the shore.

The council's response will explain that the two projects must share the landing point and cable route and that National Grid Group must coordinate the projects of its subsidiaries so that the projects can be consented to at the same time and be fully coordinated.

- **FOXHALL RECYCLING CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT COMPLETED AHEAD OF SCHEDULE**

The new and improved Foxhall Recycling Centre in Ipswich is now fully open to all customers as construction works have been completed ahead of schedule. Work on the project began in October 2022 and was originally anticipated for completion in early 2024. The site remained open throughout the build, but service was reduced for business and trade customers and there were temporary restrictions on some waste types while space was limited.

The new site, designed by Concertus Design and Property Consultants and built by R G Carter, increases capacity for vehicles on site, improves access from Foxhall Road and reduces queuing on the highway. It also has a new raised-level construction, giving better access to containers for users without the need for stairs.

Improvements have also been made to the site's Re-use shop, which sells furniture, sports equipment, kitchen supplies, books, toys and bric-a-brac collected at Suffolk's recycling centres and which would otherwise have been disposed of as waste. The project was originally expected to cost £7.8 million, but the increased cost of materials and high inflation since the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine resulted in the final cost of the refurbishment being £8.3 million. The construction work was all completed within the agreed contract price and the scheme benefitted from a £958,914 contribution from East Suffolk Council through the Community Infrastructure Levy on development schemes.

[To visit the recycling centre, you will need to book an appointment on suffolk.gov.uk](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk). Appointments are not needed to visit the Re-use Shop, which is open 7 days a week.

- **WHY WE HAVE NOT OBJECTED TO SEA LINK ENERGY PLANS AT THIS STAGE**

A column by Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment.

Everyone in Suffolk is now becoming aware of the many energy projects being proposed in our region, from the Sunnica solar farm in the west, pylon projects through the centre of the county and a myriad of schemes along our coastline. Even if you don't live on the coast, many people will still be affected by the impact of these schemes, whether that's proposals for substations that are further inland, or pylons which would carry around much of the extra power that is being produced.

Recently, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet considered Sea Link, which is a proposal for the development of a new 2-gigawatt electricity offshore energy connection between Suffolk and Kent.

This isn't a project which has been granted permission, nor is it at the final planning stage, which we expect to start in the second half of 2024. However, it is at an important phase, which is a statutory consultation.

This has been an opportunity for residents, stakeholders, and local councils to share thoughts about the plans as they currently stand. As the county council, we have staff who put together a comprehensive response, taking into account all aspects of the proposal – from the impact it would have on your community, wildlife, the environment, traffic, tourism, and the list goes on.

At last week's cabinet meeting, we agreed on what the council's position should be on Sea Link. We heard both sides of the argument – the need to support the country's energy security and a future for clean energy, but also the need to protect our communities and environment.

We agree with all these points, but we did not make a formal objection to Sea Link at this point. Let me explain why.

It is true that we think the proposal is not currently satisfactory. There are many pieces of information missing from the current plans, which makes it very difficult to make an informed decision. For example, at this stage the extent of the scheme is unconfirmed, access arrangements are speculative, design and mitigation measures are unformed, and we've yet to see details of how the impact on tourism will be addressed.

But this lack of detail is not a reason to object at this moment. I can't recall any infrastructure proposal presenting all the necessary information during these consultation stages. To object now, on lack of detail, would set a precedent that would see the county council object to all similar applications at the statutory consultation stage. This stance is neither credible nor effective. Furthermore, if the required detail were to be produced, the council would have to withdraw its objection.

I see these consultations as a way for all parties – you, me, the council, residents, and communities – to work together to shape the proposals put forward for the Planning Inspectorate to examine. It's at that point when we can all make an informed decision on whether to object.

In parallel, the county council plays an important role in trying to influence strategic energy issues. By this, I mean ensuring the energy produced in and around Suffolk is transmitted to where it is needed with the least possible impact on our area.

To this end, we have been at the forefront – with the region's MPs – of calling for an offshore grid in East Anglia. Such an approach could remove much of the strain on our county.

So what did the cabinet agree on regarding Sea Link?

We noted that the LionLink project has shown no attempt to coordinate with Sea Link. This means the council would likely recommend an objection to LionLink further down the line. The council expects National Grid to better manage projects under their umbrella to minimise the harm to our environment and the communities.

In addition, the outcomes of the Offshore Coordination Support Scheme and the review of connections in East Anglia, which is due to be undertaken by the National Grid Electricity System Operator, are unknown. Therefore, we cannot come to a reasonably informed conclusion about the Sea Link project at this stage.

We have, therefore, written to National Grid saying they must assess two things: the coordinated connection of windfarms and interconnectors at Bradwell and the Isle of Grain and to determine exactly what a coordinated offshore network would need to look like.

I hope that helps to explain why we have not objected to the Sea Link project at this stage. We will continue to work with local communities to see the best possible final proposal, and then we can make our final decisions.

- **MORE MONEY FOR ADULT & CHILDREN'S CARE, BUT DIFFICULT DECISIONS ARE NEEDED**

In the next two years, Suffolk County Council needs to pump almost £74 million extra into protecting the county's most vulnerable residents.

- £74 million extra needed to protect the most vulnerable over two years
- £64.7 million savings to be made over two years
- Council set to reduce workforce, services and use savings

As part of financial plans to prioritise those in greatest need, an additional £42.7 million for children's services and £29.9 million for adult care are being proposed.

Along with local authorities up and down the country, the council has been hit hard by inflation and rising demand for services such as children's care, special educational needs and disabilities and home-to-school transport. It means having to make difficult decisions about the services it provides, including £64.7 million of savings in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The two-year savings proposals, which have been published on the council's website, include:

- £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.
- £30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme, which has focused on reducing demand for more expensive social care options by boosting people's independence and ability to stay well for longer through innovative methods including cutting edge care technology. This transformation programme has already saved £30.7 million over the last six years
- £0.5 million of savings by stopping core funding to Art and Museum sector organisations. To assist with the transition, £528,000 of COVID recovery money will be made available to Arts and Museum sector organisations for 2024/25 which will fully cover the funding reduction for one year.
- £140,000 of savings by centralising Suffolk Archives to The Hold and closing the branches in West and East Suffolk. In February 2023, the council committed £3.4m to relocate the West Suffolk Archives branch to the proposed Western Way development. Remaining at its current location would have required over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. West Suffolk Council has since decided not to progress with the Western Way development, ending that opportunity. Centralising the three branches into one brings Suffolk in line with the majority of archive services across the country and is better value for taxpayers' money.
- £15.9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024/25 budget.

Following the recent funding announcement from the Government, Suffolk County Council will not receive enough funding to keep pace with inflation or the level of demand for services. The council has joined national calls for additional funding, and lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer direct.

Full details of Suffolk County Council's financial plans for 2024/25 will be presented to its Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 January.

The proposals would give the council a budget of around £752 million for 2024/25, made up of funding coming from Government, business rates, charges for services and council tax. The proposed budget would require a 4.99% increase in council tax in next year. This would be made up of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and a 2% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means the costs for a household would be:

- Band B property: £23.50 per week (£1.12 per week increase from 2023/24)
(Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- Band D property: £30.21 per week (£1.43 per week increase from 2023/24)

The budget proposals will be discussed at the council's Scrutiny Committee and then presented at the Cabinet meeting on 30 January. At the Full Council meeting on 15 February, the proposals will be debated, with a vote taking place on the budget for 2024/25 – the first year of the two-year budget proposals.

The Scrutiny Committee meeting will be available to stream on Suffolk County Council's YouTube channel, and public questions can be submitted in advance, details are available at www.suffolk.gov.uk.

For further information from my report or questions please contact me at:

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