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October 2022 Town and Parish Newsletter

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Build Back Better
Build Back Stronger
Build Back Greener

Campaign launched to boost metal packaging recycling rates across Suffolk

On October 3rd, a new initiative encouraging households to recycle metal packaging was rolled out by the Suffolk Waste Partnership.

'MetalMatters' will see residents targeted with educational messages via a communications campaign comprising social media and outdoor advertising activities.

Expected to reach more than 350,000 households, the programme will run for a six-week period, commencing on Monday 3 October.

The Suffolk Waste Partnership is proud to support MetalMatters, which is run by Alupro, the **Aluminium Packaging Recycling Organisation**.

Designed to improve metal packaging recycling rates, the programme has reached more than seven million households nationwide since its launch in 2012.

For more information about MetalMatters visit: **www.metalmatters.org.uk**. To find out more about recycling in Suffolk visit **www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk**.

£7.8m redevelopment of Foxhall Recycling Centre to begin

It was announced on October 4th that work on a major expansion of the Foxhall Recycling Centre near Ipswich is set to begin.

RG Carter Ltd has been appointed by Suffolk County Council as contractor for the £7.8 million project, with work scheduled to start on October 17.

The new design will increase capacity for cars on site, reduce queuing and improve access from Foxhall Road, and provide greater capacity to meet future growth.

The site will have a raised level construction, giving better access to the containers for users without the need for stairs.

Containers can also be emptied without the need to close the site.

The funding includes £794,414 from East Suffolk Council through the Community Infrastructure Levy collected from new housing developments in the East Suffolk area.

Work is scheduled to complete in early 2024 and the site will remain open to the public during construction.

RG Carter will work alongside **Concertus Design and Property Consultants** on the scheme.

The project will be conducted in phases to keep the centre operational throughout the build, but at certain times this may result in fewer booking slots being available to the public.

The Re-use shop will change location in the new layout and will need to be closed for a period early next year to allow this to take place.

The project will also see the installation of a feeder lane from Foxhall Road, making access into the site safer.

Of the 11 recycling centres around the county Foxhall accounts for 19% of recycling and waste, collecting more than 12,500 tonnes a year.

Councillor Richard Smith, Cabinet member for Economic Development, Transport Strategy and Waste, said:

“This is a significant investment in Foxhall recycling centre that will bring benefits to its users for many years to come.

“Whilst the centre will remain open during work this will be a complex project which will, inevitably, result in some disruption at times, so I would ask the public to be patient while improvements are being made.

“Foxhall is the busiest recycling centre in the county, so once complete this really will be a flagship site for Suffolk residents.”

Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership rolls out ANPR devices to target speeding motorists

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding.

I was very pleased that Suffolk County Council has been able to roll out a mobile number plate recognition system to target speeding motorists.

This issue is one that is of huge concern to councils and communities locally and nationally, and which here in Suffolk the Police and I are determined to target.

This innovative project is part of the Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership between Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Constabulary thanks to a £400,000 grant from the council's 2020 fund.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) will be rotated around sites where there is a problem with speeding or rat-running on roads with a 20mph or 30mph speed limit.

There are ten of these devices and they work like conventional SIDs by displaying the speeds of drivers to them as they approach, encouraging them to slow down.

However, the difference is that if a driver continues to ignore the speed limit the ANPR camera will take a picture of them and record the date, time, speed, vehicle registration and a photo of the vehicle.

In certain cases, persistent offenders will be reported to Suffolk Constabulary and, while no one will be prosecuted as a direct result of the devices, they may be visited by a police officer who will speak to them about their driving

So, if no prosecution arises, you might ask what is the point of them? Well, in the majority of cases people seeing the SIDs flash that their speed is over the limit will slow down, so the cameras have done their job.

Unfortunately though there are some people who will ignore the limits, and these are the people whose details will be shared with the police.

The information shared with the police will also help them decide on where speed enforcement vans should be deployed going forward.

So, the case for SIDs is that as part of the bigger picture they will make a valuable contribution to tackling speeding and therefore are money well spent and a welcome addition to the county's roads.

It is no exaggeration to say that speeding is one of the biggest areas of complaint that we as councillors receive, and it is understandable why.

As well as being dangerous to both the person speeding and innocent road-users, be they motorists, cyclist or pedestrian, it is a blight on the community and peoples' quality of life.

Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Constabulary and the Police & Crime Commissioner have worked together with local people for many years to tackle concerns about speeding.

We have developed an approach which offers both enforcement and education to suit the needs and concerns of local communities, details of which can be found at the Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership website.

If you have concerns about speeding I encourage you to contact your parish or town council or, if there is no such council available to you, to contact your local county councillor.

The £400,000 for the ANPR SIDS project was from the Suffolk 2020 Fund, a £3 million fund set up for investment in emerging policy priorities.

This fund was made possible because of the decision of this council to use part of the Government's one-year financial settlement to invest in some of the beneficial community projects that ordinarily may not have received as much focus or opportunity, given the other huge, costly frontline services that the county council is responsible for.

The fund was used to deliver a range of initiatives and projects that provide a positive, tangible impact, such as the ANPR cameras.

Work on setting up and enabling this, and other projects, began in early 2021 and it is now that we are starting to see the fruits of those labours, a range of new community projects that will benefit people for years to come.

Projects such as these are a real force in bringing communities together, with outcomes which provide many social and environmental benefits now and in the future.

Air quality survey launched in Ipswich

On October 6th, Suffolk County Council Public Health launched an Air Quality survey in the Ipswich area to help inform future intervention in the town.

The survey aims to measure current levels of understanding about air quality and current work going on in this area to mitigate its impact, in order to inform future approaches to improve air quality in the town.

The survey will be supported by an air quality event held on Ipswich Cornhill on Monday 24 October between 11am and 3pm.

This event will be held in conjunction with local partners, Ipswich Borough Council, the University of Suffolk, the NHS and Healthwatch Suffolk, and aims to raise awareness of the effects of poor air quality on health and wellbeing, promote work that is currently going on to mitigate those effects and engage with residents about what approaches could be explored to tackle this important health issue.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Protection, said:

“Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, as long-term exposure to air pollution can cause and exacerbate chronic conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, as well as lung cancer, leading to reduced life expectancy.

“Whilst air quality levels in Suffolk are generally very good, there are 8 areas known as air quality management areas, in the county, 4 of which are in Ipswich.

“The survey and engagement event in Ipswich form a part of the work that Suffolk County Council and partners are doing to address this vital issue. I encourage residents to get involved by completing the survey or attending this event you can help inform future work to improve air quality.”

To find out more about Air Quality in Suffolk and to complete the survey, please visit **Suffolk Air Quality | Healthy Suffolk**.

Cost of living to impact council's budget

Suffolk County Council is keen to hear from Suffolk residents, businesses and local communities, as it decides its budget for next year.

An online survey has been launched, and a number of focus groups will be held, for you to have your say on the services which are important to you.

A summary of your responses will be included in the report considered by the council when agreeing the budget in February 2023.

The budget setting process includes your thoughts, advice from council officers, elected members from political groups, businesses and partners in health and other public service organisations across Suffolk.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment at Suffolk County Council, said:

"Setting our budget each year is always challenging, but I always strive to offer taxpayers the best possible value. We work hard to maintain all our services and invest where can, which is what we were able to achieve last year.

"However, this year is going to be much more difficult. Many people that I speak to think that councils are not affected by the increase in the cost of living – unfortunately this is not the case. Many of the pressures households are facing, we are facing too.

"The high rates of inflation mean that our day-to-day costs are going up, the things that we need to buy today are markedly more expensive than this time last year. On top of which, we are still feeling the effects of the pandemic, and continue to see more demand for our services, particularly caring for adults and young people.

"All this means that we need a significant increase to our budget, just to be in a position to provide the same level of service as last year. If we want to spend more money on one service, we must reduce the spend on another, that's the balance we have to find."
The two main ways in which the council can increase its budget, are an increase in the money it receives from Government, and by increasing its share of council tax bills.

Last year, Suffolk County Council increased its overall share of council tax by 2.99%, the equivalent of 80p per week for a Band D property. It continues to lobby central government, alongside many local authorities, to evidence the need for more funding for local services.

With careful financial planning and management, the council has saved hundreds of millions of pounds in recent years. This has been achieved through transformation programs which have made the organisation leaner, whilst still protecting many services from large-scale reductions. It also committed £12.8m to the decarbonisation of its estate, which has already achieved impressive results. One of the council's main operational buildings has seen a year-on-year reduction in gas consumption by 84%, meaning financial and carbon savings.

A proposed budget will be presented at a Cabinet meeting in January 2023 and the final budget will be discussed at Full Council in February 2023.

The online survey is open throughout October and November, and focus groups are being organised with local community groups and for members of the public. Details of these will be shared on the council's website and social media channels in due course.

Next round of new SEND places agreed by Cabinet

On October 11th the Council's Cabinet agreed a new wave of funding to continue its programme to provide places for children and young people with SEND.

The £3million agreement marks the start of Phase 3 of the Capital Programme to create three additional specialist units providing 42 additional places for students with special educational needs and disabilities. This follows Phase 1 of the programme which created 825 news places across Suffolk and Phase 2, which was signed off in June 2022, and will create up to 73 new places.

So far, £45million has been allocated by Suffolk County Council to deliver the new places for Phase 1 and Phase 2 - £15million of which has been provided by the Department for Education.

In addition, Cabinet also agreed to support the Department for Education's High Needs Provision Capital Funding (HNPCF) for 2023/24 of £7million to be spent on the development of units attached to mainstream schools to support students with social, emotional and mental health problems and speech, language and communication needs. This will create up to 168 new spaces, and is an addition to previous funding agreed from the Department for Education in 2022/23 for up to 78 new places.

The third item signed off today was Cabinet's support for the application for funding for two free schools from the Department for Education. One of these will be in east Suffolk and support children with severe learning difficulties and the second will be built in Sudbury for those with autistic spectrum disorder and complex social, emotional and mental health problems. If the bids are successful, both schools will teach children and young people from across Suffolk.

In total, Suffolk will deliver up to 1,317 new places for children and young people with SEND by 2025/26.

Rachel Hood, Cabinet member for Education, SEND and Skills at Suffolk County Council, said:

"We are seeing a continued increase in demand for specialist places for children and young people with SEND in Suffolk and it is vital we continue to stay ahead of this increased demand.
"I have seen first-hand the positive impact that these units have for children with additional needs, and their families."
The next step for Phase 3 is for schools across Suffolk to express an interest in having a specialist unit and, following these expressions of interest, the most suitable sites will be chosen. This programme for improved provision is informed by the SEND Sufficiency Plan 2022-25.

New special schools opened in Suffolk include Castle EAST, a communication and interaction school in north Suffolk; a social, emotional and mental health school in west Suffolk named Sir Peter Hall; and a communication and interaction school in south Suffolk, Woodbridge Road Academy.

More Suffolk residents to benefit from digital services and thrive online

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet has approved a suite of digital inclusion recommendations aimed at helping people get online.

Following a Policy Development Panel (PDP) review of what more could be done to remove barriers to accessing services online, and increase levels of digital inclusion in the county, the following recommendations were approved to go ahead:

- Creation of a Digital Inclusion Fund, aimed at funding community projects that support increased digital inclusion
- Adoption of the Digital Health and Care Guiding Principles developed by Healthwatch Suffolk, in co-production with service users, to underpin the Council's own development of online services
- Commitment of up to £77k to the community 'Digital Champions' initiative and training offer, enabling its expansion across the county and extending the initiative until October 2023
- Further development of the council's pioneering approach to digital health and care through its Cassius service.

These approved recommendations will provide the blueprint for a Digital Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan which will span the next three years; setting out to have a positive impact on those who are missing out on the benefits of being online, in areas such as job prospects, finances, learning opportunities, health, and wellbeing. Helping people to become digitally included will, in turn, bring wider social benefits.

The County Council and its partners want Suffolk to be a place where residents understand the benefits of being online, are aware of opportunities, feel safe and confident online and are supported to develop their skills and thrive in an increasingly digital world.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Suffolk County Council's Leader, said:

"Everything we do in life, especially since the pandemic is becoming increasingly more digital, so now more than ever it is essential that all residents feel they can access services digitally and make the most of being online.

"We recognise that there are some hurdles which may be putting people off embracing the digital world, but this puts them at a disadvantage and could rob them of opportunities which they could otherwise benefit from.

"Approving these recommendations and demonstrating our commitment to upskilling residents and helping them feel more confident online will help people to be better informed, pay less for things, be more employable, feel more independent, be less isolated, and live happier, healthier, easier lives."

Fraudulent farmer found guilty of fleecing his victims

A west Suffolk farmer who fraudulently obtained over £765,000 in credit from suppliers has been convicted at Ipswich Crown Court.

The conviction was obtained following involvement from Suffolk Trading Standards.

Wayne Parker, 35, from Mildenhall, operated under Wayne Parker Farming and presented himself as a legitimate livestock owner with a successful sheep and cattle business.

This facade enabled Parker to be given credit by a wide range of companies including animal suppliers, agricultural equipment stockists, landlords and vets after he claimed to be a person of good standing who would pay what he owed.

Despite his assurances, Parker often made no attempt to settle his debts and, when he did, repeatedly didn't have the funds to cover payments, resulting in bounced cheques. In addition, the farmer misled his creditors by using a series of delaying tactics such as alleging that there were problems with his bank account or that he had fallen victim to hackers.

Parker's dishonesty didn't end there; he provided screenshots to suppliers of purported confirmation of payments when this wasn't the case.

His actions caught up with him as, after a court hearing lasting three weeks, Parker was found guilty on Tuesday 11 October of fraudulent trading and will be sentenced at a later date.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection, added:

"I am immensely grateful to officers from Suffolk Trading Standards for their tireless work on this case.

"Wayne Parker knew full well that he did not have the funds to pay off his debts, but this did not stop him from making more and more purchases, from livestock to luxury cars. Even once declared bankrupt, he continued to lie to suppliers, taking advantage of their trust and good faith in him without any thought to the consequences.

"We recognise that Parker is in the minority, with most business owners in Suffolk being true to their word. However, I hope today's outcome sends a clear message to anyone tempted to use lies and deception to live beyond their means that this behaviour will not be tolerated in our county."

Parker was previously prosecuted by Suffolk Trading Standards for posing a serious risk of spreading Bovine Tuberculosis. His crimes then included failing to dispose of farmed animal remains appropriately, moving large quantities of cattle without following the required processes and not keeping adequate records of his cattle.

At this sentencing, held at Ipswich Magistrates Court in February 2020, Parker received a 12-week custodial sentence, suspended for 18 months, and was ordered to pay a £122 victim surcharge, along with costs to Suffolk Trading Standards.

Suffolk Museum Award winners announced

The awards evening was hosted by Georgy Jamieson of BBC Radio Suffolk.

Six of Suffolk's outstanding museums and their teams have been announced as winners in this year's Suffolk Museum of the Year Awards, at a ceremony at The Hold in Ipswich on Monday 10 October.

The winners were:

- Large Museum of the Year: Food Museum
- Small Museum of the Year: Felixstowe Museum
- Family Friendly Award: The Red House
- Innovation Award: Bawdsey Radar
- Working with Young People Award: Halesworth and District Museum
- Volunteer of the Year: Steve Bell of Norfolk and Suffolk Aviation Museum
- Object of the Year (as voted for by the public in an online vote in September): Halesworth and District Museum for their Blythburgh coin.

In addition, the following museums and volunteers were recognised as highly commended:

- National Horseracing Museum in the Large Museum of the Year category
- Dunwich Museum in the Family Friendly category
- The volunteer team at Royal Naval Patrol Service Museum in the Volunteer/s of the Year category.

The awards are organised by the Association for Suffolk Museums to celebrate and champion the county's incredible museums and the hard work and dedication of their staff and volunteers.

Food Museum staff and volunteers being awarded Large Suffolk Museum of the Year by Councillor Bobby Bennett, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Equality & Communities, from left to right:

- Sue Michell, Volunteer
- Laura Kloss, Learning Officer
- Chloe Brett, Visitor Services & Marketing Manager
- Lisa Harris, Collection & Interpretation Manager
- Jenny Cousins, Director.

Winners were chosen by an independent judging panel, including representatives from SHARE Museums East, a museum development organisation, the University of Suffolk and Community Action Suffolk. They reviewed the 31 public nominations that were made for all of the award categories, representing 15 of Suffolk's museums. In the Object of the Year category, the Blythburgh coin from Halesworth and District Museum was the runaway winner, receiving 46% of nearly 600 votes from the public.

Councillor Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities, said:

“The last awards ceremony was back in 2019 so it was wonderful to hear about the many ways museums in Suffolk have overcome the difficulties of the past few years and in fact continued to excel in offering fantastic experiences to their visitors and communities. It was a great evening of celebration and I encourage everyone to look up their local museum and see what they’ve got to offer!”

Launch of 'Childhood' – short film to raise awareness of the need for foster carers

In a ground-breaking national collaboration, 56 Local Authorities across England have worked together to create a short film to raise awareness of fostering.

It is aimed at finding more people who may be interested in becoming foster carers and providing nurturing, positive homes for children and young people across the country who need them.

The new film, simply called 'Childhood', highlights the impact of neglect on children, particularly brothers and sisters who may be left at times to try and care for each other. It shows the journey of 'Sophie' and 'Charlie' who are in a very difficult home situation where their needs are not being met, to being nurtured and supported through foster care to attend school and be able to enjoy their hobbies and interests. In other words, have a childhood. **Watch the short film on YouTube**.

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Deputy Cabinet Member for Fostering and Adoption, said:

"Children in need of foster carers are some of the most vulnerable members of our society and helping them grow into successful, confident and resilient young adults can be hugely rewarding.

"It's really important to get more people talking about foster care and I would encourage Suffolk residents to look at their own lives to consider whether they have the patience, compassion and the spare room required to provide a child with the secure home life they need."

The aim is that this film will be shared on all 56 participating council's social media and other platforms, right across the country, reaching many more people and leading them to consider whether the rewarding role of fostering could be an option for them.

If you think you might be interested or know someone who might be interested in becoming a foster carer, then please don't hesitate to get in touch on **01473 264800** or alternatively **visit our the Fostering page** on our website for more information.

Being prepared for winter matters to Suffolk County Council

As the days get shorter and temperatures continue to drop, it certainly feels like winter is on the way.

Although I agree that it's probably far too early to mention Christmas, we should all start to give some thought to preparing for the changing season – something Suffolk County Council is here to help with.

Today marks the start of the council's new Winter Matters campaign, a campaign packed full of tips and advice to help you and your loved ones look after your money, health, wellbeing and safety during the colder months.

As we do with so much of our work, the council has partnered with organisations and services from across the county who are already providing support for people in Suffolk, such as the Rural Coffee Caravan and Community Action Suffolk, to ensure we can help those who need it most. I would like to offer them my thanks for their help with this campaign.

Of course, every year Suffolk County Council helps families and communities with essential services, whether it be by gritting icy roads, commissioning social care support, or attending fires, but this year especially we are asking that people make their own preparations to enable them to have a happy and healthy winter. It would take too long for me to list all the various parts of this campaign, but I wanted to highlight just a few.

Winter marks the start of the flu season, and of course the shadow of COVID hasn't gone away. Protect yourself and those you care about by getting the flu and covid vaccines as soon as you are eligible.

Vaccination is still the best defence against these serious and potentially life-threatening illnesses, and I am delighted that more than 173,000 people in Suffolk have already had their autumn COVID booster vaccine.

Don't forget, when notified you can book your COVID vaccination appointment or find a walk-in clinic near you by visiting **SNEE NHS Covid-19 Vaccination webpage**.

We can all play our part in helping to slow the spread of viruses this winter by washing or sanitising our hands regularly. Anyone feeling unwell should ideally stay at home to protect others if they can. If you're ill and have to leave the house, please consider keeping your distance from people or wearing a face covering if you must get close to them.

As well as looking after our health, it's important for us to prioritise wellbeing this winter, with ongoing increases to the Cost of Living being a source of stress for many.

I know this is especially true when it comes to energy bills. Whilst Government has stepped in to help cap the average cost of energy, additional help is at hand from Warm Homes Suffolk, which provides support on making homes more energy efficient and cheaper to heat.

The service can offer assistance with fuel payments, discuss energy efficiency improvements, help you access grants to pay for insulation, and assess your eligibility for

contributions towards the cost of repairs or replacements if your boiler or heater stops working.

If high energy bills are preventing you from putting the heating on, or you know anyone who may need extra help heating their home, please contact Warm Homes Suffolk on **03456 037 686**.

Further guidance on national and local support with household costs, including food and essentials, is available on our website. **Visit the Cost of Living page** to find out what help you could be entitled to, as well as tips and advice for saving money.

Although rising prices may prompt many of us to look for a good deal this winter, this should not be at the expense of safety.

Online auction sites or social media marketplaces can be rife with counterfeit goods or products that don't meet the UK's stringent safety laws. These often haven't been properly tested and could pose a serious risk of fire, serious injury or even death.

Buying from reputable retailers will help to keep you safe and remember, if a deal looks too good to be true, it probably is.

You can also reduce the chances of a fire in your home this winter by taking a few simple steps such as regularly cleaning your chimney before use, never leaving candles or open fires unattended and switching off electrical appliances before bed, including fairy lights on Christmas trees.

There is a wealth of information on this and other ways in which you can prepare on **the Winter Matters page**. We will also be sharing advice on social media and distributing leaflets via the Rural Coffee Caravan and Suffolk Libraries to support everyone in Suffolk.

New Fen Bridge over River Stour

The newly installed replacement Fen Bridge, which crosses over the River Stour and links Dedham and East Bergholt has been opened to the public.

Following the closure and subsequent removal of the previous wooden arch bridge, a great deal of activity took place to design, fabricate and install its replacement. The 13-tonne, 23.7 metre-long bridge was lifted into place late September. Works then took place to fix the bridge to the supports, modify the existing supports to suit the new bridge dimensions, and reconstruct the steps on the approaches.

Comprised of a pair of painted arched steel beams supporting Ekki hardwood decking and parapets, the bridge was prefabricated off-site, delivered to site in one piece and lifted into position using a large mobile crane.

The design life of the new bridge is 120 years and replaces the former timber beam bridge which was erected in 1985.

The process for replacing the bridge not only involved the design and fabrication, but also how the bridge would be transported to site, the land requirements needed and obtaining environment consents to work over the water course. This included constructing and then removing approximately one kilometre of temporary access track, including four temporary bridges crossing buried services from Dedham Road across the meadows to the bridge site to provide access for the large mobile crane and delivery of the new bridge.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"This bridge is an incredibly important part of these communities and such a fantastic asset to this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. I know those living locally and the many visitors to the area have missed being able to cross the bridge whilst it has been closed, so I am delighted that we have been able to fund, build and replace it.

"I want to thank all for their patience and cooperation whilst the route was out of action, and we look forward to seeing the new bridge used and enjoyed for years to come."

First section of Gull Wing Bridge in Lowestoft placed over East Suffolk railway line

The first major steel section of the Gull Wing bridge in Lowestoft has been moved into its final position over the East Suffolk railway line.

This is following a successful weekend-long track possession and a complex engineering operation.

Leading civil engineering and building contractor Farrans is constructing the bridge for Suffolk County Council.

The North Approach Viaduct (NAV1) section arrived at the construction site on Lake Lothing on Tuesday March 1 on a barge following a 32-hour crossing from Victor Buyck Steel Construction in Ghent in Belgium.

It weighed 380 tonnes on delivery. Since then, the bridge has had a reinforced concrete deck and parapets added to it and in its move to its final position it weighed close to 1,450 tonnes.

The operation began at midnight on Friday evening and concluded on Monday at 5am when the line was returned to Network Rail.

NAV1 was moved using self-propelled modular transporters (SPMTs), multi-axle hydraulic units which can be added together depending on the length of the load.

Sixteen individual axles in two rows of two maneuvered the section into its final position.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said: “This is a significant and exciting milestone in the building of the Gull Wing bridge.

“People can now start seeing the bridge really begin to take shape, a structure which once finished will have a huge and positive impact on the town of Lowestoft and the wider area.

“It will open up investment into the town by tackling congestion and improving connectivity for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.”

Peter Aldous, MP for Waveney, said:

“It’s good news that progress continues to be made on the construction of the Gull Wing Bridge, which once completed will change our skyline forever; making it easier to travel between north and south Lowestoft, reducing traffic congestion in the town, and attracting new investment to the area.

“It is essential to ensure that the bridge, which has been such a long time coming, delivers a lasting legacy of increased business activity and skilled jobs for local people, and I will be doing everything I can to ensure that this happens.”

The Challenges facing council budgets

A Column by Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Finance and Environment

I fully appreciate that an article about "council budgets" is unlikely to be the most exciting thing you read today! However, I hope that you'll stick with me for a few minutes, to understand how Suffolk County Council's budget setting process works and the difficulties we face this year.

More importantly, I want to set out how you can share your thoughts on how we spend what is ultimately your money. Your views really will be taken into account, as we shape decisions for next year.

This year, we have around £625m to spend on everything that we do. That's from financing the fire and rescue service, to maintaining our roads and providing school transport. We have the freedom to choose where some of that money is spent, but we are legally required to spend certain amounts, such as on schools.

Of that pot the largest amount, around £6 in every £10, comes from council tax. The remainder is made up from the council's share of business rates, and the money we receive each year from the Government (known as our 'settlement').

The current budget was a real challenge to manage, not least due to uncertainties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet we were still able to maintain all our services and invest in some areas. Unfortunately, this year, we face much more of a challenge.

Councils across the country are subject to many of the financial pressures that we all face at home, such as rising energy costs. The high rates of inflation mean that the council's day-to-day costs are going up, the goods and services that we need to buy today are markedly more expensive than this time last year.

On top of this, there is the national wage increase and we continue to experience more demand for our services, particularly care services for adults and children.

Many councils are facing a situation where they will encounter a considerable budget gap – which is the shortfall between what needs to be spent, and money that's available. At the time of writing, our estimated budget gap could be as much as £56m.

If we do not have the money that we need, then if we want or need to increase spending on one service, we have to reduce the spend somewhere else. That's the balance we have to find and it is never easy.

In short, councils need more money in their budgets just to be able to maintain levels of the service that they provide. There are two main ways that we can achieve this; receiving more money from the Government in our settlement and by increasing council tax. Of course, over and above this we always try to 'transform' and modernise our services, so we can do more with less and maximise the income the council can generate.

Regarding the settlement, we continually lobby Government to increase our settlement to meet the demands that we face, to be able to provide you with the services that you expect. In recent times, this money has been decided on a year-by-year basis and I am hopeful that

this December we will be given a two-year settlement. This will allow us to plan with a much greater degree of certainty.

Last year we did increase our share of council tax, which worked out at 80p per week for a Band D property. We had the option to raise it by more, but decided against it – recognising the pressures households were facing as we emerged from the pandemic.

We also look at making savings within the council itself. Through careful planning, we have saved hundreds of millions of pounds in recent years. This has made the organisation leaner – we have far fewer staff than we did ten years ago and spend less than the vast majority of County Councils on staffing, whilst protecting many services from large-scale reductions.

It has also enabled us to make key investments, such as committing £12.8m to make our buildings and land more carbon friendly and reduce our impact on the environment. This has already achieved impressive results with one of our main buildings seeing a year-on-year reduction in gas consumption by 84%, meaning financial and carbon savings.

With all this in mind, I would welcome your thoughts on our budget for next year.

We launched a public survey two weeks ago, to ask you which services are important to you. There are just three questions to answer and it should only take a few minutes to complete.

We have already had over 1,100 responses – thank you if you have already shared your thoughts.

I'm looking at the data on a regular basis, and your responses will be included in the report considered by the council when we agree the budget in February 2023. Alongside asking which services you'd prioritise, we ask that always controversial question – given everything you've heard do you think council tax should increase? I'd be really grateful if you could share your thoughts at **www.suffolk.gov.uk/budget**

Women's Tour 'buzz' brings more than £1m economic impact to region's economy

On Monday 6 June 2022, 97 riders from 17 international teams sped through Essex and Suffolk for The Women's Tour.

The Women's Tour, Britain's longest running women's stage cycling race and part of the UCI Women's WorldTour, not only wowed spectators on its first stage from Colchester to Bury St Edmunds this summer but also helped generate almost £1.1m of net economic benefit according to an independent survey out today (Friday 28 October) from race organisers, Sweetspot.

On Monday 6 June 2022, 97 riders from 17 international teams sped through Essex and Suffolk for Stage 1: Colchester to Bury St Edmunds. Following the tour's 'Grand Depart' from the Sports Park at Colchester Northern Gateway, the race passed through Colchester High Street, Layer-de-la-Haye, Abberton, Old Heath and Greenstead before heading towards Manningtree and into Suffolk through Bildeston, Stowmarket and Lavenham to the finish line on Angel Hill in Bury St Edmunds.

The event was hosted by Colchester Borough Council and Suffolk County Council in partnership with West Suffolk and Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and supported by Colchester Amphora Trading, Suffolk Growth, Colchester BID, East of England Co-op and Vertas.

The '2022 Women's Tour Economic Impact Report', based on findings from a web-based survey of 527 Women's Tour spectators, reveals that over 45,500 spectators lined the 88 mile route on the day, with more than 15,000 of these coming to see the event from outside of their local areas and over 80% pledging to visit the area again. The local hospitality industry also benefited with 8,000 attendees enjoying overnight stays and spending on average £138.80; whilst the average spend for day visitors was £52.96.

The one-hour TV Highlights programme shown on ITV4 and Eurosport generated a combined audience of 460,500, showcasing the region to a global audience, promoting the area as a destination of choice for tourism.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Protection at Suffolk County Council, said:

"It's always a pleasure to host the Women's Tour here in Suffolk. The race brings with it a feeling of pride and a real boost to residents, particularly to those who live along the route. It also showcases to a global audience, all that Suffolk has to offer for visitors to the county.

"Sporting events like these are a great way to encourage residents to be more active, with 61% of spectators saying they were inspired to cycle more often following this year's race."

Could you help a Ukrainian family in need?

Suffolk County Council is asking anyone with spare space to consider signing up to host a Ukrainian family.

Some Ukrainian guests, who arrived in the UK via the Homes for Ukraine scheme, have now been with their sponsors for six months.

Sponsors of the Homes for Ukraine scheme originally signed up to host guests for at least six months, with the option for those who are willing and able to continue beyond this. Not all hosts are able to continue to offer accommodation to guests beyond six months and some of those guests are not yet ready to move on to private rented accommodation. The county is now in need of new hosts to offer them a safe haven while the war in Ukraine continues.

The council is looking for a wide range of homes for single people, mothers with children, and larger families. Areas in particular need of new hosts are Bury St Edmunds, Felixstowe, Haverhill, Ipswich and Lowestoft.

Self-contained accommodation is particularly helpful, for instance an annexe, holiday let or second home.

It is now possible to register with Suffolk County Council if you are interested in hosting a Ukrainian family – visit **www.suffolk.gov.uk/ukraine** to find out more.

In partnership with the County Council, Community Action Suffolk are holding a number of drop-in sessions over the coming weeks, for potential new hosts to find out more about hosting a Ukrainian family.

There will be opportunities to ask questions and understand more about what is involved, including what makes a suitable property, what checks they will need to undertake and more information about the matching process.

The events are aimed at anyone who is interested in hosting Ukrainian guests, either in their own home or a separate property that they own.

Councillor Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities, said:

“We are extremely grateful to those who are able to continue to provide invaluable support to families beyond the initial six-month period, however we fully understand that some will be unable to, due to changes in their circumstances in this time. Supporting a person or family fleeing conflict is no mean feat and it cannot be underestimated how much of a difference this makes to their lives.

“If you think you can help, or know of anybody who could, please get in touch, or attend one of the drop-in sessions to find out more.”
Visit **www.suffolk.gov.uk/ukraine** to sign up and to find out more, including the experiences of people who have hosted Ukrainian families in their homes.

Or visit one of the upcoming drop-in sessions:

Bury St Edmunds:

Wednesday 2 November, 12.30pm – 2.30pm
The Centre
St John's Street
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP33 1SN

Ipswich:

Tuesday 8 November, 11.30am – 1:30pm
Ipswich Cornhill
Ipswich
IP1 1DD

Lowestoft:

Wednesday 9 November, 3pm – 5pm
The Kirkley Centre
London Road South
Lowestoft
NR33 0AZ

Felixstowe:

Friday 11 November, 12.30pm-2.30pm
Felixstowe URC
Tomline Road
Felixstowe
IP11 7PA