September 2026

Parish Report

Suffolk County Council Halesworth Division

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Wildfire on Dunwich Heath

Only a week after the Reform UK administration at the council made the decision to scrap its Climate Emergency Declaration, a wildfire broke out on Dunwich Heath on the coast which took several days to get under control and has caused an enormous amount of damage to rare heathland habitat in one of the most beautiful and much-loved parts of the county. Suffolk Fire and Rescue worked with firefighters from all over the country to get it under control and at the height of the fire there were 120 firefighters tackling the blaze, with displaced residents needing shelter and support. The local community rallied and opened up Westleton village hall to help, and local farmers helped to bring in water by tractor to terrain that could not be reached by fire engines. This is only one of many climate-related incidents attended by blue light services over the summer, where intense heat and lack of rain have made the Suffolk countryside a tinder box for fires. Whatever the cause of the fire, it is climate change that created the conditions for this fire and others to burn so quickly and for so long, and to be so difficult to get under control. There have also been claims in the press and online that rewilding causes wildfires, but the evidence shows the opposite – rewilded areas retain water better and remain green during hot weather. In any case, Dunwich Heath is a traditionally managed nature reserve and is not a rewilding site. The area that has been destroyed is the size of 210 football pitches.

Following the fire, the Suffolk Fire Brigade Union wrote to the Prime Minister to explain that fire services need more investment in equipment in order to fight wildfires: systems to collect water and clothing that was less heavy and boots for outdoor terrain for when crews were required to walk for miles. He also highlighted the need to increase firefighter capacity in the light of the number of fires and that more 4x4 vehicles would be useful. Suffolk currently receives less than average funding from the government for its fire service, although it is one of the driest areas in the country and is therefore more likely to be hit by wildfires in our increasing hot, dry summers.

Changes to Councillor Policies

The new Reform UK administration at the council has decided to spend around £18k to remodel the Leader's office at Endeavour House, claiming this work was needed as there is not enough room in the current Leader's office. The rationale given for this work is also that there is not enough room for the group to work in the existing suite of rooms. Reform UK has 41 councilors, but the previous Conservative administration had 54 councilors and found the rooms adequate. The money is being spent to enlarge the Leader's office into the meeting room next door. Only two people will have keycard access to this new large room, so it is not likely to be used by the rest of the Reform group. Other changes prioritised by the new Reform administration includes a new policy on Pets in the Workplace, which enables the Leader to bring in his dog while making it clear employees of the council are not to do this, and a new dedicated carparking space for the Leader (since removed, as he may have realised that it made his car, and subsequently him, vulnerable to identification). We also hear rumours that the

recent change from Pepsi to Coca Cola being stocked in the canteen is because the Leader prefers it. This isn't the greatest of news, but I wanted you to have a feeling for your new leader of Suffolk County Council.

Help to Replace Ageing Heating Systems

Suffolk public sector organisations (including all Suffolk councils) are partnering with Switch Together, a community group-buying scheme, to make it easier for Suffolk residents to replace ageing gas, oil or LPG boilers with heat pumps. Through the government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme, eligible homeowners in England can receive a grant of £7,500 toward an air source heat pump, or £9,000 for households currently heating with oil or LPG. The grant is applied for upfront by the installer, so residents do not need to claim it back or repay it. The scheme is open to homeowners and small business owners in England who are replacing a fossil fuel heating system and hold a valid Energy Performance Certificate with no outstanding major insulation recommendations. It is not means-assessed, so there is no income threshold to qualify, and the scheme is currently scheduled to run until 31 December 2027. Switch Together works by bringing residents together so that installers compete to win their business which secures better prices than homeowners could negotiate individually. Once registered, residents receive a free, no-obligation personal offer, and their installer then handles the grant application on their behalf. Switch Together's group-buying savings apply on top of the government grant. Every installation is carried out by a Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) accredited installer.

For more information about the scheme, please visit the Sustainable Suffolk website:
https://sustainablesuffolk.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/switch-together-suffolk/

Energy Efficiency Loans

Homeowners across Suffolk can now apply for a loan to help fund energy efficiency improvements to their homes, thanks to a partnership between Suffolk County Council and Lendology. The Warm Homes Suffolk Loan scheme offers eligible homeowners access to loans from £2k to £15k at a fixed interest rate of 2.2% Annual Percentage Rate (APR), with repayment terms of up to seven years. Borrowers may also repay their loan early without penalty, subject to eligibility and loan terms. The funding is designed to support residents who want to improve the energy performance of their homes while spreading the cost of installation over a manageable period.

The loan can be used for a range of energy efficiency measures, including:

- Solar photovoltaic (PV) systems
- Solar battery storage
- Solar thermal systems
- Ground source heat pumps
- Air source heat pumps
- Double and triple glazed windows and doors
- Loft, wall and floor insulation
- Ventilation systems when installed alongside insulation measures

The scheme aims to help residents reduce their energy bills and make their homes better insulated. For more information about the Warm Homes Suffolk Loan Scheme, please visit the Lendology website:
https://www.lendology.org.uk/partner/suffolk-council/

High Streets Matter: Support for Market Towns

Suffolk County Council is offering extra support to small independent and hospitality businesses across the county via its new High Street Matter programme. This will offer 75 businesses a package of one-to-one advice, funding opportunities and peer networking, with a view to help them become more resilient so high streets can thrive. Interested businesses can find out more and register here: https://www.newangliagrowthhub.co.uk/suffolks-high-streets-matter/

Public Consultation on Cuts to Healthy Child Service

Finally, Suffolk County Council's public consultation on proposed changes to its Healthy Child Service has been extended for an extra month. The proposed changes include cessation of the Young Person Pathway and Family Nurse Partnership, which provides specialist support to parents under the age of 21 after they have a baby. The proposals also include removal of the Community Staff Nurse role from Health Visiting teams, and the School Nursing service becoming term-time only. The consultation now runs until 18 October, with a decision likely to be made at Cabinet in November.

You can read through the proposals and respond to the consultation here if you have not already done so: https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations/healthy-child-services-consultations

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Social Media and Helpful Links

Follow us on:

Instagram - https://www.instagram.com/scc.green/

Facebook - https://www.facebook.com/suffolkgreens/

Group Website - https://suffolkgreens.org.uk/

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/what-to-do-in-a-flood

https://suffolkprepared.co.uk/get-prepared/risk-advice/flooding/

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

Green Party