

County Council report – July 2019

New electric vehicle charging points to be installed in Suffolk

Electric vehicle charging points will be installed at Suffolk Business Park in Bury St Edmunds.

Currently under construction, Suffolk Business Park in Bury St Edmunds has announced that it will explore ways of working with Plug In Suffolk, the UK's first fully open public electric vehicle (EV) fast charging network. Installing EV charging points at the site will be an incentive for potential tenants, customers and visitors.

Plug In Suffolk, launched earlier this year, is a project run in partnership with Suffolk County Council, Stowmarket-based EO Charging, and renewable energy provider, Bulb. It aims to install up to 400 EV charging points across the county at 100 business premises, car parks, hotels and anywhere that EVs could park for a short amount of time. This will make Suffolk a national leader in EV infrastructure.

The fast charging points supplied by Plug In Suffolk do not require any registration, membership or apps - drivers simply park, plug-in and charge using contactless payment.

The overall cost to businesses is negligible and, if used regularly, can even generate a small income. For further information or to apply to join the 'Plug In Suffolk' network head to www.pluginsuffolk.org

Conversations start as county council seeks solutions to bus funding challenge

On 19 June, Suffolk County Council met with representatives from Suffolk's bus operators to see whether they can run a number of bus services without public subsidy. This follows a reduction in the amount of public money available.

The meeting, involving 11 of Suffolk's biggest bus operating companies, follows decisions taken in February 2019 on how to save £13 million from Suffolk County Council's budget, including £340,000 from the authority's passenger transport budget.

This led to a cross-party policy development panel being set up to agree how decisions should be made about the funding of services. A new, fair and thorough set of criteria was adopted in May 2019, including passenger numbers, subsidy per single ticket, integration with other services, the number of entitled students using a service, and the percentage of journeys made by concessionary pass holders.

Of the 211 bus routes currently operating throughout Suffolk, 61 are subsidised by public money. 23 of these will have their public funding removed. This does not mean that these services will necessarily end, just that public funding is no longer affordable.

In 2017/18, the 23 services were responsible for 107,624 single journeys out of a total of 14.9million journeys made across the county. This means that the services are responsible for only 0.7% of journeys per year.

A full list of the affected routes has been published on Suffolk County Council's website www.suffolkonboard.com and includes services where the council is currently paying a subsidy of £12.64 per single ticket which equates to over £25.00 per round trip.

Councillor Mary Evans, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Issues said:

“We need to ensure we spend public money effectively. In reviewing these services against our new funding criteria, we have had to make tough decisions. However, the implementation of the new criteria has enabled these decisions to be made in a robust and transparent way and ensures we consider key measures before making tough calls.

“We are committed to working with bus operators and partners to explore other sources of funding to support these services once SCC funding ceases. We are also open to conversations with community groups and partners to see if local solutions can be developed.”

“I recognise the importance of passenger transport and I remain committed to ensuring that Suffolk’s residents have access to it.”

Following conversations with bus operators and partners, the county council will review the situation at the end of July 2019 before determining next steps. The council aims to have operators taking on these services on a commercial basis from the end of October.

Suffolk pothole repair scheme to go countywide

A trial scheme to tackle potholes swiftly has been so successful it is being rolled out across Suffolk.

The Suffolk Highways scheme, which started in Ipswich in October 2018, changes how potholes are categorised.

The new system allows engineers to repair potholes close to each other during the same visit, tackling smaller potholes before they can expand. Previously, they fixed larger holes first and smaller ones at a later date. The new policy reduces the amount of time workers have to travel between jobs.

Mary Evans, Cabinet Member for Highways on Suffolk County Council, said the scheme would be rolled out permanently across the county this summer.

She said the previous system had been "incredibly complicated", leading to highways workers complaining that they were "driving over potholes to get to potholes".

Mrs Evans said: "The rate you pay the gangs is the same whatever they do, and the material they put in the pothole is the same, so the efficiency savings comes from the travel time.

"I am really pleased - it's about looking at ways the system can be more efficient."