

November 2024 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

SCC set on major investment to further protect Suffolk from flooding as it calls on Government to 'step up'

SCC has announced its intention to invest another £1.5 million to carry out important flooding prevention work. SCC calls on Government to recognise ongoing impact of Storm Babet and fund £20 million of further prevention work urgently needed. Extensive work already completed since Storm Babet including more than 111,000 drains cleared and significant road repairs. The commitment comes as initial flood investigation reports have identified that a further £20 million is needed to complete the work – a figure that the county council can't afford. The council has therefore written to the Flooding Minister, Emma Hardy MP, and demanded the government step up and plug the funding gap. [Storm Babet - Letter to DEFRA](#)

Examples of the kind of projects that could be delivered include:

- Creating flood water retention ponds in land above villages and green spaces within communities to capture water and slow the flow into residential areas.
- Installing flood doors and non-return valves on drains to stop water entering properties that are particularly at risk of flooding.
- Help landowners with advice and guidance, especially those within responsibilities to maintain ditches and streams on their properties (known as 'riparian ownership').
- Bolstering Suffolk Highways' resources to deliver planned and reactive maintenance on the county's roads and footpaths.

Since Storm Babet, our teams have been working hard to repair the damage it caused, investigate what happened and to help reduce the flood risk in future. This preventative work is complex, costly and requires lots of agencies work together. Despite limited resources and budgetary challenges facing all county councils, we have managed to find extra money to tackle flooding and propose investing a further £1.5 million to deliver work identified in our investigations. However, this isn't enough and - so steep is the challenge facing areas like Suffolk, who were hit hard by Storm Babet - the government must act and provide extra funding. This is why we've written to the Flooding Minister asking for additional money. The government needs to step up to the plate and help us ensure Suffolk's residents don't face uncertainty when these extreme weather events occur. I saw firsthand how devastating the impact of Storm Babet was for many families and businesses across Suffolk. The finished flood investigation reports give us a clear understanding of what work needs to be done and at what cost. It is right that we continue to increase our resources appropriately, but unless the government acts too we will not be able to go as far as our residents deserve. Storm Babet struck between October 18 and 21 last year and caused substantial flooding and disruption across Suffolk. A month's worth of rain fell in 24 hours, flooding more than 900 homes and businesses. The impact of the storm was exceptional and demanded an urgent multiagency response. So far, Suffolk County Council has committed more than £13.75 million for work to aid recovery from Storm Babet. The council has already committed £12.25 million, including:

- £1 million on bringing in additional flood investigation specialists
- £1.25 million for repairs to Suffolk's highways following the flood damage
- £10 million funding, which was committed in 2021, to address long-standing drainage issues over three years. This complements £2 million a year invested in drainage repairs and improvements funded from the Department for Transport maintenance grant.
- Cleared 96% of highway drainage gullies across Suffolk, more than 111,000. This involves lifting the iron grates and sucking up the debris that has washed off the roads
- Attended more than 3,500 emergency call outs for flooding related incidents – an unprecedented number. This includes pumping an estimated 2.5million litres of water from the roads, removing 53 tonnes of debris and clearing 121 fallen trees

Government's new housing targets must put infrastructure first

Suffolk County Council has raised concerns in its response to the government's proposed reforms for planning policies for England. In particular, it expresses fears about the lack of clarity around infrastructure, such as schools, transport, waste and community facilities when new housing developments are approved. The government closed its consultation on plans to change the National Planning Policy Framework and other parts of the planning system. The proposals include a significant increase in the number of new homes to be built across Suffolk – the government's own figures suggest that East Suffolk alone would see an 87% increase in the number new homes, compared those currently planned. Such a significant uplift in new homes in Suffolk, if not accompanied by the correct funding for affordable homes and infrastructure, will ring alarm bells with local residents. This cannot continue with huge pressure placed on the county with the new government's housing targets, without the appropriate infrastructure to sit alongside it. This is simply not sustainable – infrastructure must be delivered in a timely manner. If residential developments emerge that are not included in local plans because of the new government's policy, then the onus must be on the developer to confirm how infrastructure will be delivered. SCC is already very active in securing developer contributions and delivering infrastructure. It secures Section 106 contributions as well as funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy from district councils - but this is to maintain a baseline level of service rather than make a positive overall improvement to infrastructure. In its response to government, the council said that the simple question of "who pays" for the infrastructure needs to be answered when permissions are being granted. Local planning authorities should not be allowed to assume that other authorities and agencies will make up any difference.

Have your say on SCC budget

Suffolk County Council is seeking feedback from residents, businesses and community organisations as it prepares its budget for the next financial year. The council has launched an online consultation to explain its current financial position and give Suffolk residents an opportunity to share their views on proposed Council Tax changes and spending priorities. The consultation offers an opportunity to understand how the council manages its finances, the cost-saving measures already in place, and how the council might generate more money to support essential services. The council can increase its budget in two main ways: by receiving more funding from the government or by increasing Council Tax. The consultation asks residents for feedback on which council services they have used recently, whether they support increasing Council Tax contributions, and which areas they would like to see prioritised in the council's budget-setting process. Responses to the consultation will be considered alongside feedback from businesses, public sector partners and elected members, as well as advice from council officers, as it prepares next year's budget. The demand for council services, particularly adult and children's care, is rising every year, and while Suffolk County Council has managed its finances well for many years, public funding has not kept pace. Despite these challenges, we are committed to prioritising support for our most vulnerable residents, but this does mean that we continue to face difficult decisions about the other services we deliver. Councils across the country are facing critical funding issues. Whilst the Chancellor has announced some extra money for local government, we will not be told how much will come to Suffolk until later in the year. In the meantime, we must prepare to navigate another challenging budget, which will require new approaches and tough choices. That is why it's important that we hear from residents, businesses and other community groups in Suffolk. Your feedback will help us to plan for the future and ensure we make informed decisions on service priorities and Council Tax. The consultation opens today, Friday 1st November, and closes on Monday 16th December 2024. To participate, visit www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/2025_26_budget The results of the consultation will be included in a final report when the budget is set in February 2025.

Suffolk Highways unveils new gritting fleet named by county's young people

With winter approaching, Suffolk Highways has welcomed 38 new gritters to replace its existing fleet, including Kieran McSpreader, Albert Brinestein and Morgan Freezeman. The new gritters have a digital operating system with the latest route map planning software, ensuring they are winter ready to keep Suffolk's roads safe and moving in the event of ice or snow. A competition to name the gritters was launched at this year's Suffolk Show, with winning entries including Salty, Gritty McGrit Face and Grit Britain, being unveiled during a recent ceremony in Ipswich. There are also multiple Suffolk-related names in the fleet, such as Spread Sheeran, Lizzie Gritzzini and Grit Rhys Jones in recognition of some of the county's famous residents. They are not the only celebrities to be honoured, as Gritney Houston, Spready Mercury, Keanu Freeze, Lewis Caploughdie, and David Attenbrrrrr are set to grace Suffolk's roads in the coming weeks and months. I am delighted that Suffolk Highways has welcomed 38 state-of-the-art gritters to its fleet, with the names chosen by our county's young people likely to raise a smile when they are spotted out and about this winter. Although last winter season was milder than previous years, Suffolk Highways still gritted over 3,200 miles of road, roughly the distance from London to Dubai, in response to road temperatures being forecast to drop below one degree celsius on 62 occasions. This is a testament to the dedication and commitment of our winter maintenance drivers, who often work around the clock or sacrifice time with their loved ones to ensure that Suffolk's roads are gritted and ready for use by highway users. However, we all still need to play our part by driving to the conditions and preparing our own vehicles for winter. Whilst the weather has been warmer in recent weeks, Suffolk residents may get a glimpse of the new gritting fleet when they carry out their test grit runs in the coming days. Further information on winter maintenance carried out by Suffolk Highways, including which roads are gritted, can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/highway-maintenance/check-which-roads-are-gritted.

Council to offer interest-free loans to make homes more energy efficient

SCC will offer interest-free loans to help make residents' homes warmer, safer and cheaper to run. Energy efficiency upgrades such as insulation, solar panels, batteries, glazing, or heat pumps will all be possible with loans of up to £15,000 to be repaid over a maximum of 7 years at 0% interest. The £3 million project will be open to homeowners across Suffolk from November, but you can [register your interest now at Lendology](#). Making homes more energy-efficient helps retain their heat and use less energy, meaning homeowners can save on their energy bills and reduce their carbon emissions. A warm home also has a positive impact on health and well-being. This loan scheme will help hundreds of Suffolk residents to make their homes more energy efficient. It will put money back in their pockets, by saving on their energy bills. We all have a responsibility to ensure homes can cope with the changes in climate, keeping people cooler in summer and warmer in winter, and ultimately reducing our carbon emissions. This loan scheme is one way we're helping people to do that – and at the same time, they are benefitting from improvements to their homes. One of the other highlights is that more than the initial £3 million will be generated for loans – when people make their repayments, the money goes back into the pot and is available for someone else. We hope it will be accessible for many years. Money for the loans comes from £3 million of funding received as part of the council's negotiations with the previous government to secure a County Deal. It was allocated from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to support an energy efficiency and energy generation 0% loan fund for people that cannot access grants currently available to low-income households. SCC is partnering with Lendology CIC to deliver the interest-free loan scheme. Lendology CIC is an experienced Social Enterprise Lender, managing similar schemes with councils across the country. For more information and to register your interest in an interest-free loan, visit [Lendology's website](#).

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