

Sunnica challenge ends as two councils pull out

Judicial review proceedings from four local councils against the Sunnica solar farm project will not be pursued after West Suffolk Council and Cambridgeshire County Council chose to withdraw from the process.

Suffolk County Council and East Cambridgeshire District Council remained committed to seeing through the legal challenge but were left in an impossible position to continue.

With West Suffolk Council and Cambridgeshire County Council abandoning the process, the cost of legal fees for the two remaining councils versus the likely financial return in a successful outcome was no longer a justifiable use of public funds.

Although both councils still had the desire to take things forward, the loss of two councils in the group action is damaging to the process as a whole.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"We are deeply disappointed by West Suffolk Council and Cambridgeshire County Council choosing not to challenge the outrageous decision by the government to approve the Sunnica solar farm that spans our two counties.

"The Sunnica solar farm was approved by the new government against the recommendation of the independent Planning Inspectorate, who said it should be thrown out. In pulling out of this challenge, the two councils have demonstrated they are intent on serving the interests of the government over the interests of local communities and taxpayers.

"Those councils may suggest now going cap in hand to the developer but that has little chance of success. We must not forget that this is the worst scheme we have ever dealt with and the developer has, to date, shown no interest in properly meeting our costs or properly engaging with local communities."

Councillor Anna Bailey, Leader of East Cambridgeshire District Council, said:

"I am unbelievably disappointed with the decisions of Cambridgeshire County Council and West Suffolk Council to pull out of the Group action. They have expended public funds, the legal position has not changed, and yet they are now refusing to finish what we started. What a waste and what a let-down for local residents.

"Now local taxpayers are going to have to foot the bill for the costs to the councils of this unwanted, appalling development; Cambridgeshire County Council and West Suffolk Council have seriously let the side down by allowing that to stand without challenge.

"There is still a long way to go with this application and the developer still has a huge mountain to climb before they send in the diggers to the food production fields of rural East Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. East Cambridgeshire District Council will work to do all it can to mitigate the impact of this development, secure local benefits and to stand by its residents."

All four councils had earlier received a response from the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Rt Hon. Ed Miliband MP, to their pre-action protocol letter in a bid to secure appropriate funding.

That reply outlined the government's position to defend their decision to grant permission for the Sunnica project. The councils maintain their position that the Secretary of State made a legal error, but cannot now test the case in court.

New era for Lowestoft as Gull Wing set to open

Lowestoft's Gull Wing bridge will open to the public with a community walkabout on the bridge on Saturday 7th September, heralding a new era of connectivity and regeneration for the town.

The new bridge, which was built on behalf of Suffolk County Council by leading civil engineering contractor Farrans, represents a significant step forward for Lowestoft and promises to bring both immediate and long-term benefits to the town, its businesses and residents.

It not only addresses longstanding issues with traffic congestion but will also act as a catalyst for economic growth, attracting new investment and positioning Lowestoft as a dynamic and forward-looking commercial centre and community.

By providing another route over Lake Lothing, the Gull Wing bridge will significantly ease traffic congestion in the town centre, shortening journey times and improving journey reliability. Modern cycle and pedestrian facilities on either side will encourage more sustainable modes of transport and better connect communities on the north and south of the waterway.

The bridge is expected to attract new businesses and trade to the area, create new job opportunities, and to streamline logistics and transportation, laying the foundation for continued growth in the town and surrounding area for many decades to come.

To celebrate this important milestone for Lowestoft, members of the public are invited to experience the Gull Wing before it opens to traffic. From 9am to 11:30am on Saturday 7th September, the bridge will be open exclusively to pedestrians. It is hoped this opportunity will allow the public to experience the unique scale and design of the bridge up close, as well as grab a selfie and check out the views, without any traffic.

From noon, the bridge will open to vehicles as well, with vintage Lowestoft buses from the East Anglian Transport Museum leading the way.

Parking is not available so those planning to attend the event are encouraged to use public transport or travel by foot where possible.

A rolling road closure will be in effect on the morning of Sunday 8th September, as the Tour of Britain crosses the Gull Wing during their preliminary ride-out ahead of the final stage between Lowestoft and Felixstowe.

The formal civic opening and naming ceremony for the bridge is set to take place on Tuesday 19th November. Additional details will be provided closer to the date.

Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“The people of Lowestoft have waited for a third river crossing over Lake Lothing for a long time. Suffolk County Council promised we would build a new bridge, and I am delighted to announce today that we have delivered on that promise.

“The Gull Wing will not only serve as a vital transportation link between north and south, but also stands as an iconic new landmark for the town, representing a new era of development and prosperity for Lowestoft. I look forward to seeing the positive impact it will have on our community.”

Tristram Browne, Project Manager at Farrans, said:

"Our team is proud to have delivered the iconic Gull Wing Bridge for the town of Lowestoft. We have been able to leave a lasting legacy not only with the completion of the bridge but also through our programme of social value and stakeholder engagement. During the delivery of this project we have employed 76 local people, provided apprenticeships, volunteered on local community projects and donated significant sums to local charities.

“We have brought the region on the journey of the bridge build with us, creating some memorable sights with the arrival of the bridge and bascule sections. It has been a pleasure to work on such a complex, technical project and we would like to thank the local community for their support.”

Two Suffolk flood investigation reports published in latest response to Storm Babet

Suffolk County Council has today published detailed flood reports into another two communities worst hit during Storm Babet.

The investigations into the flooding which occurred in Needham Market and Wickham Market during October 2023 have analysed what caused these events and recommend what could be done to alleviate flooding there in the future.

In Needham Market, over 45 residential and commercial properties were internally flooded. In Wickham Market, it was 40 properties. In both communities, infrastructure and services were disrupted.

The investigations found that the areas were severely impacted by flooding due to the intensity of rainfall that overwhelmed the natural flow routes and the capacity of watercourses and drainage infrastructure. This situation was compounded when overland flow paths converged with the water from rivers that had burst their banks.

Key recommendations for both areas, which include short, medium and long term proposals aimed at individual homeowners, community groups, landowners and Risk Management Authorities, include:

- Implementing community flood plans
- Maximising use of grants available to make properties more resilient to flooding
- Removing blockages in watercourses and drains (private and publicly owned)

- Investigating potential improvements to drainage infrastructure (private and publicly owned)
- Creating new natural flood management features (e.g.: storage ponds and planting that 'slows the flow' of flood water)
- Further modelling to better understand flooding within the location (Wickham Market only).

These actions could help mitigate local flood risk.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for Ipswich, operational highways and flooding, said:

"The impact of Storm Babet is still being felt across the county with some people still not back in their homes. Communities such as Needham Market and Wickham Market have suffered as a result of this storm and these in-depth investigations will help us work with them and other communities to lower flood risk and build resilience ahead of future flood events.

"We recognised the importance of carrying out these investigations thoroughly following Storm Babet, so invested an extra £1 million of funds to bring in additional specialists.

"I also urge anyone who suffered internal flooding as a result of Storm Babet to apply for the £5k grant to make their homes more resilient to future floods. Applications can be made until April 2025 and anyone interested should make contact with us at floodgrants@suffolk.gov.uk."

Suffolk County Council has a duty to investigate significant flooding under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act. These investigations help to establish the source of flooding, factors which may have caused or exacerbated the flooding, the impacts on people, services and infrastructure and make recommendations for actions which could be taken to increase resilience to future storm events.

Since the storm, targeted recovery work has been carried out across the county to ensure damaged highway infrastructure is repaired, those whose properties were flooded get help and that investigations can start which will identify how to reduce flood risk. In any usual year, Suffolk County Council carries out around three or four of these flood investigations. However, following Babet approximately 50 have been commissioned.

Suffolk residents will be able to access electric vehicles on a short-term basis, from next summer

A trial of electric community vehicles is set to launch next summer in Suffolk, with the tender process beginning this month.

Plug In Suffolk Car Clubs will be placing sixteen electric vehicles across eight locations in Suffolk which local residents can book by the minute, hour or day. Planned locations include Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket, Sudbury, Needham Market, Stowmarket, Lowestoft and Woodbridge.

Members of the public interested in this project are urged to sign up to the mailing list to receive updates as the project progresses - [Plug in Suffolk Car Clubs - Mailing List \(office.com\)](#)

Car Clubs have already offered people in other parts of the UK access to local, low-emission vehicles without the expense of owning one. Local communities in these areas have already experienced many benefits including improved air quality, reduced congestion and increased mobility for those without access to their own car.

Current providers remain reluctant to fully fund electric community vehicles in rural and semi-rural areas like Suffolk as they do not yet have the real-world data to support the usage.

The project is funded by Suffolk's public sector organisations, helping deliver on two of the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan's goals; a reduced number of cars on the road and an increased proportion of vehicles on the road that are low or zero emission. Additional charge point funding is being provided by the Department for Transport's On Street Residential ChargePoint Scheme (ORCS).

Small improvements needed as children's services' Ofsted report published

Ofsted has today published its report into Suffolk County Council's children's services. The report rated the service as 'requires improvement to be good'.

The ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) report conveys a mixed picture across Suffolk.

Importantly, inspectors concluded that children's safeguarding is strong and that the experiences and progress of children in care were good. They also reported that 'children in care thrive'.

However, they highlighted weakness in some of the processes and systems in place. These included inconsistencies with the way first contact with children and young people is processed, and the quality and support to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless. It also found inconsistencies in the level of understanding that care leavers have about the range of support available to them.

The report outlined seven points for improvement, which have either been implemented already through small amends to systems or processes, or are in progress.

Cllr Bobby Bennett, cabinet member for children and young people services at Suffolk County Council, said: "It is disappointing that Ofsted didn't find all our services to be consistently good.

“However, what really counts is that the report shows that our children are safe and well-taken care of and - in particular - our children in care are thriving.

“We need to improve some of our processes and systems, and address inconsistencies in the way we do things. These things can be improved with small uncomplicated amends and a plan of action agreed by Ofsted.

“I was delighted to read the extent of praise for staff throughout the report, including the strength of relationships with the children and families we work with, and their sensitivity and compassion. This public recognition is huge testament to their hard work and dedication.”

The inspection looked at four areas; the impact of social work practice with children and families; the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; the experiences and progress of children in care; and the experiences and progress of care leavers. Although the majority of the report is positive, three of these were graded as ‘requires improvement to be good’. The experience and progress of children in care was ‘good’.

Following publication of the report, an action plan will be sent to Ofsted by the end of September and a partnership board will be set up to oversee improvements. The council will also carry out a quality assurance review of systems and processes.