

# Information for monthly Regional Intelligence Snapshot

## Suffolk | 18 June 2010

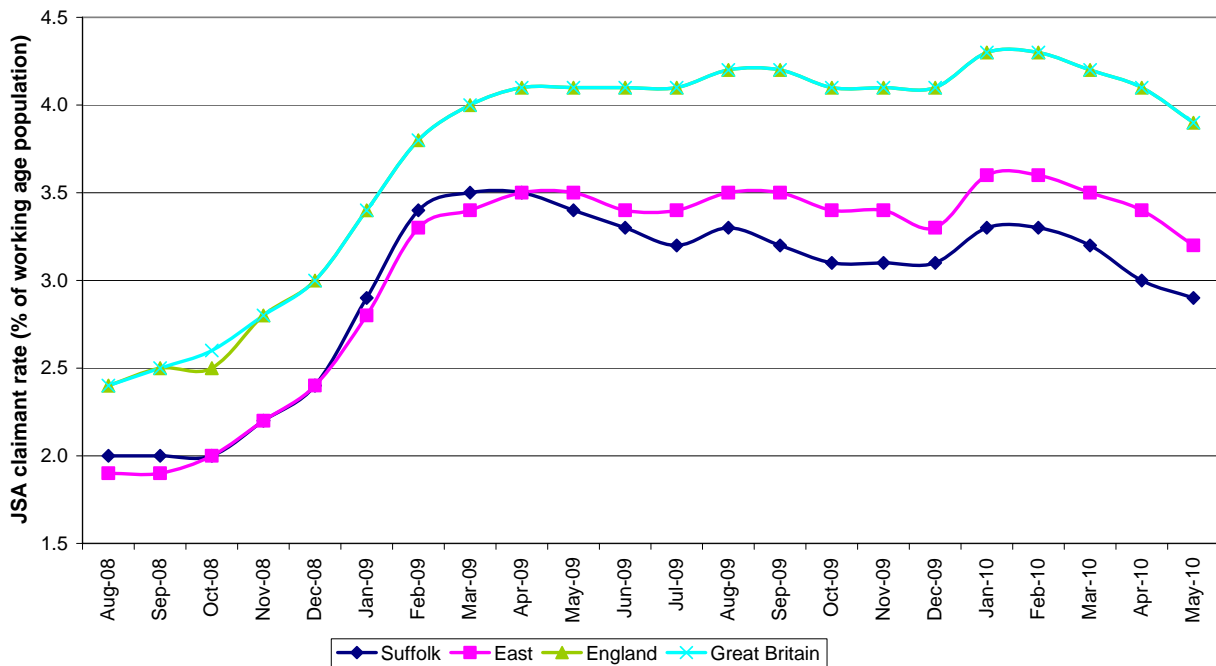
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### SUMMARY OF ECONOMIC CONDITIONS (E.G. BUSINESS CONFIDENCE, BUSINESS CONDITIONS – OUTPUT, ORDERS, EXPORTS, ETC, LABOUR MARKET, HOUSING MARKET, ANY INDUSTRY SPECIFIC TRENDS)

#### SUMMARY

- The Job Seekers Allowance claimant count decreased by 4.34% from April to May 2010, falling for the fifth month in succession. The regional and national figures also saw a decrease in claimants in May. Proportionally, the largest reduction in claimants was in Waveney (-7.87%, 218 claimants). The smallest fall was in Ipswich (-1.27% 47 claimants), with all other districts seeing moderate falls of between 3% and just over 6%. Data from Jobcentre Plus/NOMIS.
- The Job Seekers Allowance claimant rate in Suffolk remains below that of the East of England and the country as a whole.

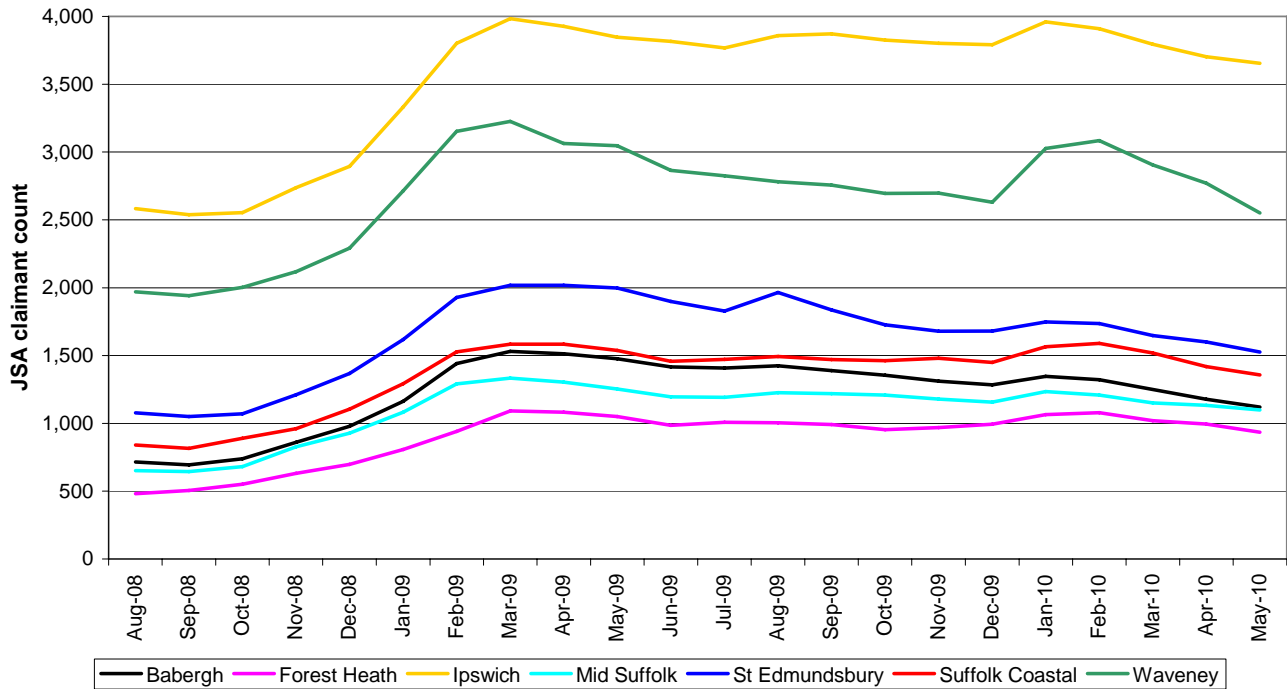
### Job Seekers Allowance claimant rate August 2008 to May 2010



- There were around 50 redundancies in May, though none have been confirmed so far in June (some are expected as the Vergo Retail store in Felixstowe is set to close) (as reported by Jobcentre Plus and local press).
- The total number of redundancies in Suffolk now stands at 5,313 since October 2008 (as reported by Jobcentre Plus and local press).
- However, there have been at least 2,154 full and part-time jobs created in Suffolk since the beginning of 2009 (as reported by Jobcentre Plus and local press).
- Average house prices in Suffolk increased for the tenth month in the past eleven, according to the latest available data from the Land Registry (April).

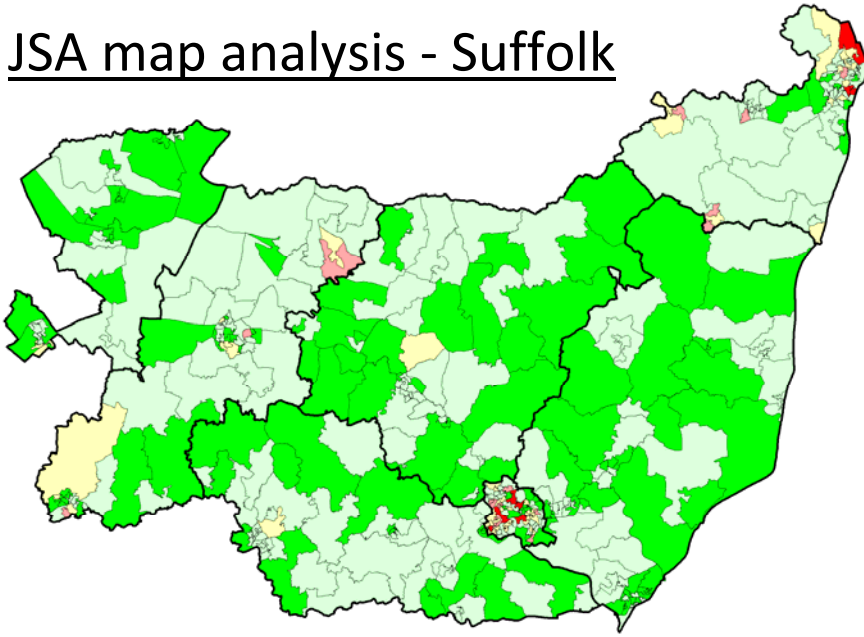
LABOUR MARKET

**Job Seekers Allowance claimant count by district**  
August 2008 to May 2010



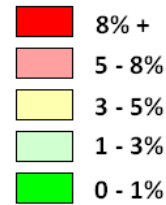
- The Suffolk Job Seekers Allowance claimant count saw a moderate decline from April to May, in line with the regional and national trend. Suffolk's figures decreased from 12,795 in March to 12,240 in April (a drop of 4.34%, 555 claimants). The claimant count levels are now similar to those last recorded in January 2009, considerably lower than the highest level seen during this recession, 14,764 in March 2009. The percentage of the working age population in Suffolk claiming JSA now sits at 2.9%, compared to a high point of 3.5% in March 2009.
- The Suffolk figures are similar to the overall trend of the East of England this month, which recorded a slightly larger decrease in JSA claimants from April to May compared to Suffolk (-5.49%, 6,516 claimants). However, the percentage of the working age population claiming JSA in Suffolk is still lower than in the East of England as a whole (2.9% in Suffolk compared to 3.2% in the East of England). JSA claimants also decreased across the country as a whole, with the claimant rate in England and Great Britain standing at 3.9%. The regional claimant count is now at its lowest point since January 2009, and the national figure is at its lowest level since February 2009.
- All seven districts in Suffolk recorded a reduction in claimants from April to May. Waveney saw the largest decrease (-7.87%), followed by Forest Heath (-6.04%), Babergh (-4.93%), St Edmundsbury (-4.69%), Suffolk Coastal (-4.37%), Mid Suffolk (both -3.09%) and finally Ipswich (-1.27%).
- The trend in the claimant count from April to May 2010 is similar to that of one year ago, which saw a 2% decline.
- Data from NOMIS Official Labour Market Statistics <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

# JSA map analysis - Suffolk

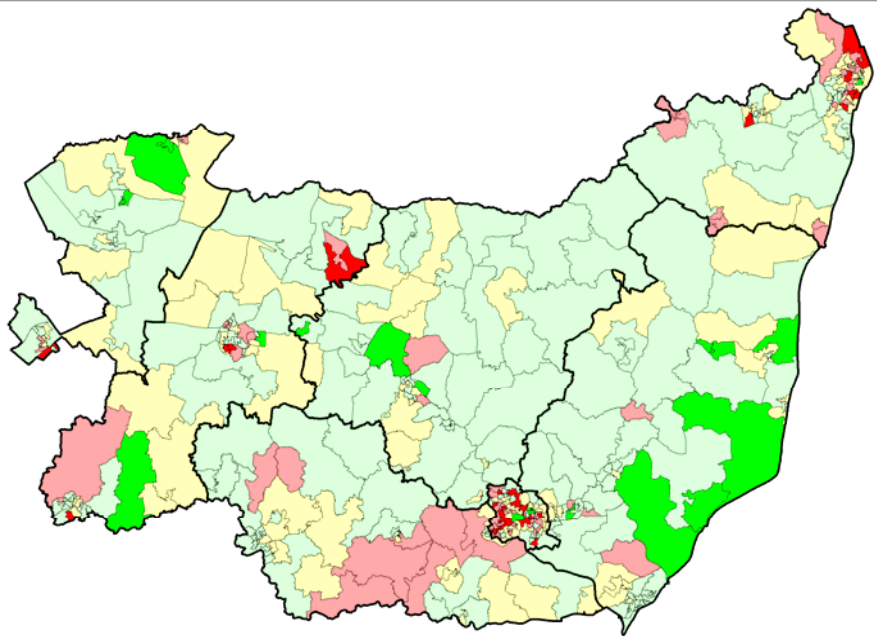


In September 2008, prior to the recession, the Job Seekers Allowance claimant rate was below 3% across the vast majority of the county, with areas of higher rates restricted to Ipswich and Lowestoft. The key below applies to all three maps.

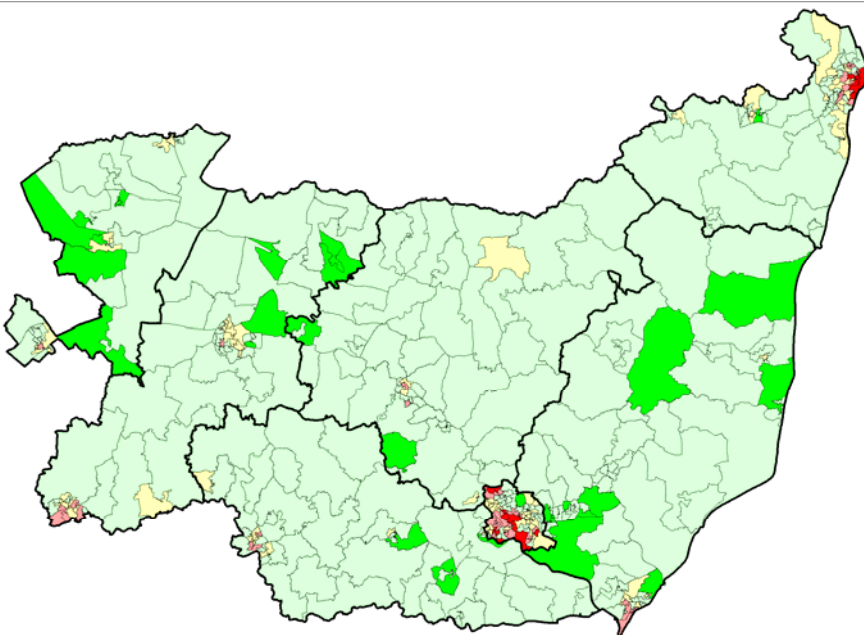
## JSA rate by LSOA



The height of the recession in Suffolk (in terms of JSA claimants at least) was in March 2009. Pockets of high claimant rates appeared in many towns including Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket, Haverhill and Beccles. The rural areas, where JSA claimants are generally very low, were also suffering.

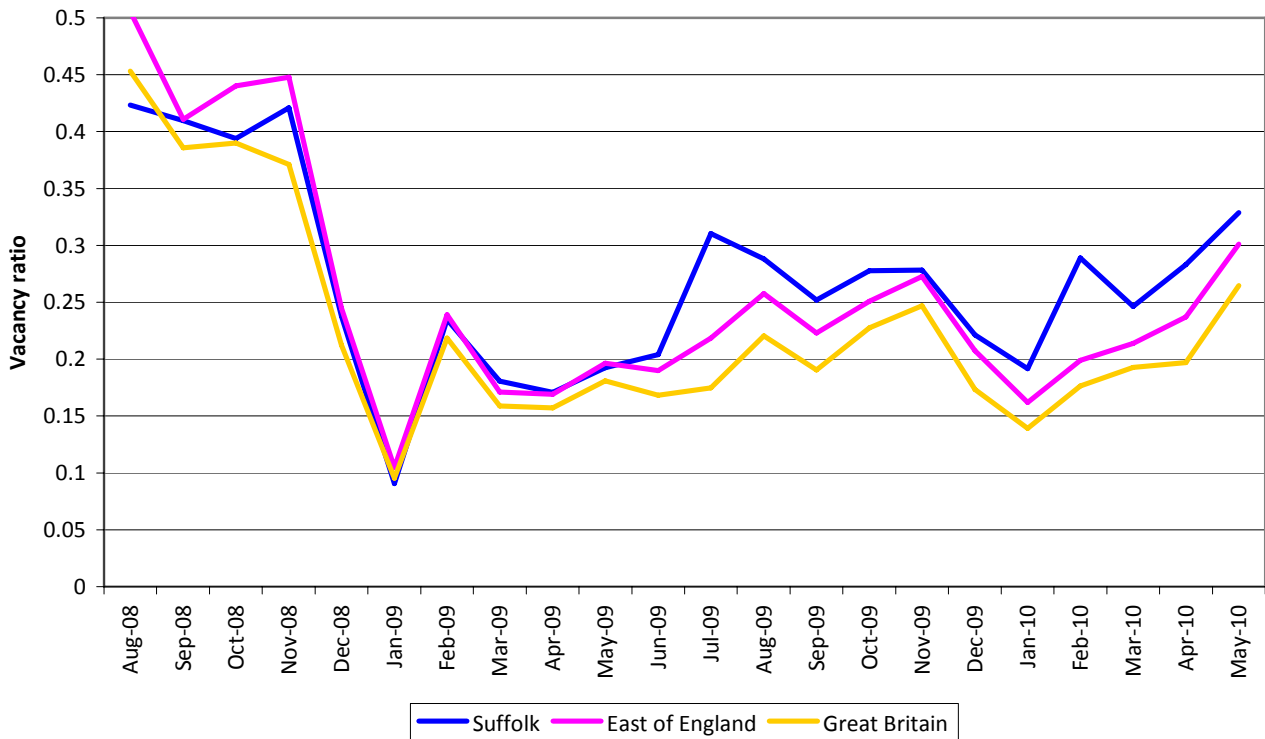


The latest data (May 2010), shows that claimant rates across much of the county have returned to levels similar to those before the recession. There have been notable changes in some areas, for example around Stanton in St Edmundsbury where the claimant rate has fallen from over 8% in March 2009 to less than 1% in May 2010.



## VACANCIES

**Vacancy ratio - number of vacancies per Job Seekers Allowance claimant**

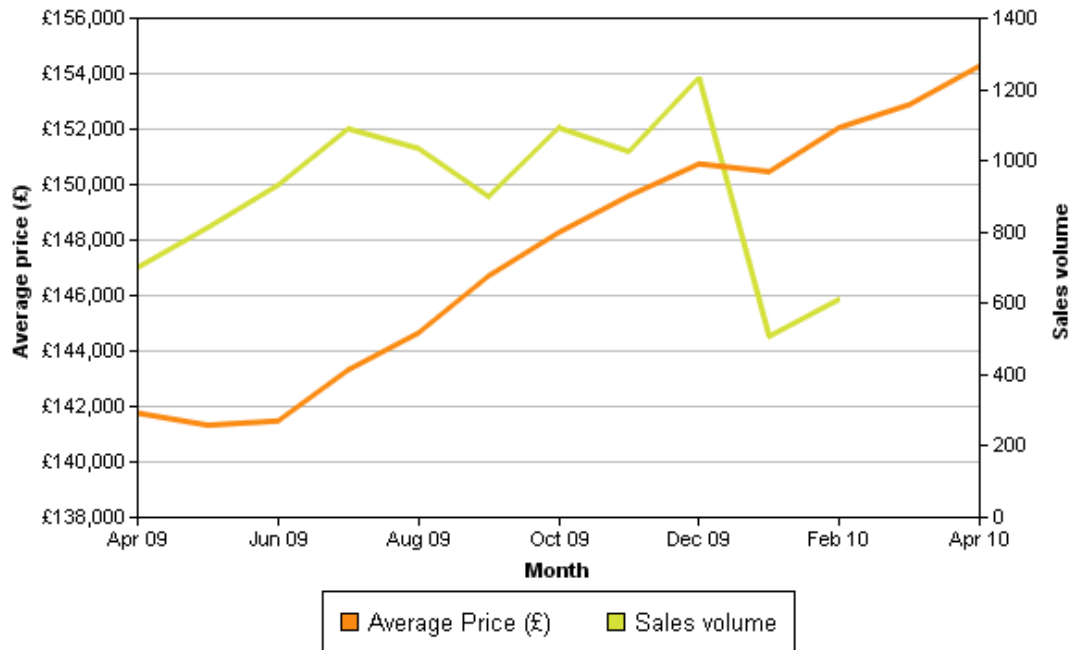


- The number of Jobcentre Plus vacancies per Job Seekers Allowance claimant in Suffolk has improved for the second month in succession and continues to be higher than the East of England and national figure.
- The number of vacancies is higher than this time in 2009. Data from NOMIS <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

	Babergh	Forest Heath	Ipswich	Mid Suffolk	St Edmundsbury	Suffolk Coastal	Waveney	Suffolk
August 2008	252	420	886	242	665	456	601	3,522
September 2008	372	295	812	275	868	373	359	3,354
October 2008	358	283	947	244	695	335	481	3,343
November 2008	343	410	880	606	903	382	409	3,933
December 2008	253	277	628	270	386	266	361	2,441
January 2009	99	82	235	81	282	160	149	1,088
February 2009	238	278	759	202	699	486	647	3,309
March 2009	224	303	540	227	503	242	627	2,666
April 2009	246	208	609	212	544	295	362	2,476
May 2009	203	219	563	246	523	470	511	2,735
June 2009	198	313	580	264	527	473	426	2,781
July 2009	277	353	1,729	180	528	623	499	4,189
August 2009	235	470	782	303	972	701	499	3,962
September 2009	289	275	873	283	761	456	475	3,412
October 2009	379	272	1,048	267	729	487	490	3,672
November 2009	270	491	1,004	347	696	380	461	3,649
December 2009	247	259	837	274	491	432	334	2,874
January 2010	248	316	651	174	495	368	422	2,674
February 2010	341	327	965	425	689	697	583	4,027
March 2010	242	331	1,038	313	593	328	427	3,272
April 2010	269	384	1,001	372	617	475	506	3,624
May 2010	297	531	980	375	609	559	673	4,024

## HOUSING MARKET

### House price and sales volume - Suffolk



### House Price Index report - Suffolk (April 2009 - April 2010)

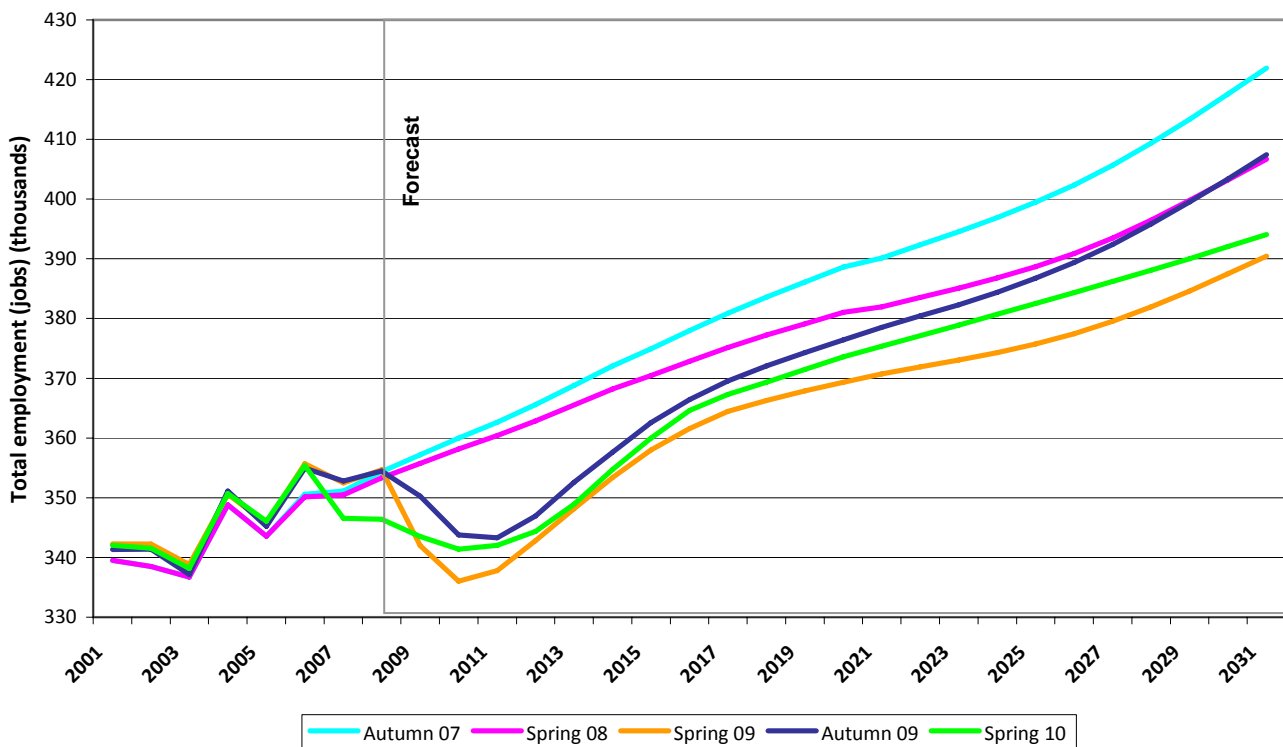
Month	Index	Average Price (£)	Monthly Change (%)	Annual Change (%)	Sales Volume
April 2009	252.8	141,762	-1.4	-17.7	701
May 2009	252	141,326	-0.3	-17.2	813
June 2009	252.3	141,478	0.1	-16.5	932
July 2009	255.6	143,320	1.3	-15.1	1,090
August 2009	257.9	144,651	0.9	-13.2	1,035
September 2009	261.6	146,708	1.4	-10.2	900
October 2009	264.4	148,275	1.1	-6.9	1,093
November 2009	266.8	149,597	0.9	-3.9	1,026
December 2009	268.8	150,747	0.8	-0.3	1,234
January 2010	268.3	150,469	-0.2	0.6	508
February 2010	271.1	152,060	1.1	3.8	612
March 2010	272.6	152,888	0.5	6.3	-
April 2010	275.1	154,281	0.9	8.8	-

- Average prices in Suffolk increased for the tenth month out of the last eleven according to the latest available data (April 2010).
  - The rise for the month of April was £1,393.
  - Average price now sits at £154,281, back to levels experienced well over a year ago in December 2008.
  - Sales volumes fell dramatically in January following a rise in December, reflecting seasonal trend and the end of the stamp duty holiday on 31<sup>st</sup> December. This is likely to have caused transactions that may normally have been completed in January to be rushed through during December. Sales volumes picked up again slightly in February. No data is provided for the two most recent months.
- Data from the Land Registry <http://www.landregistry.gov.uk/>

## ECONOMIC FORECASTING

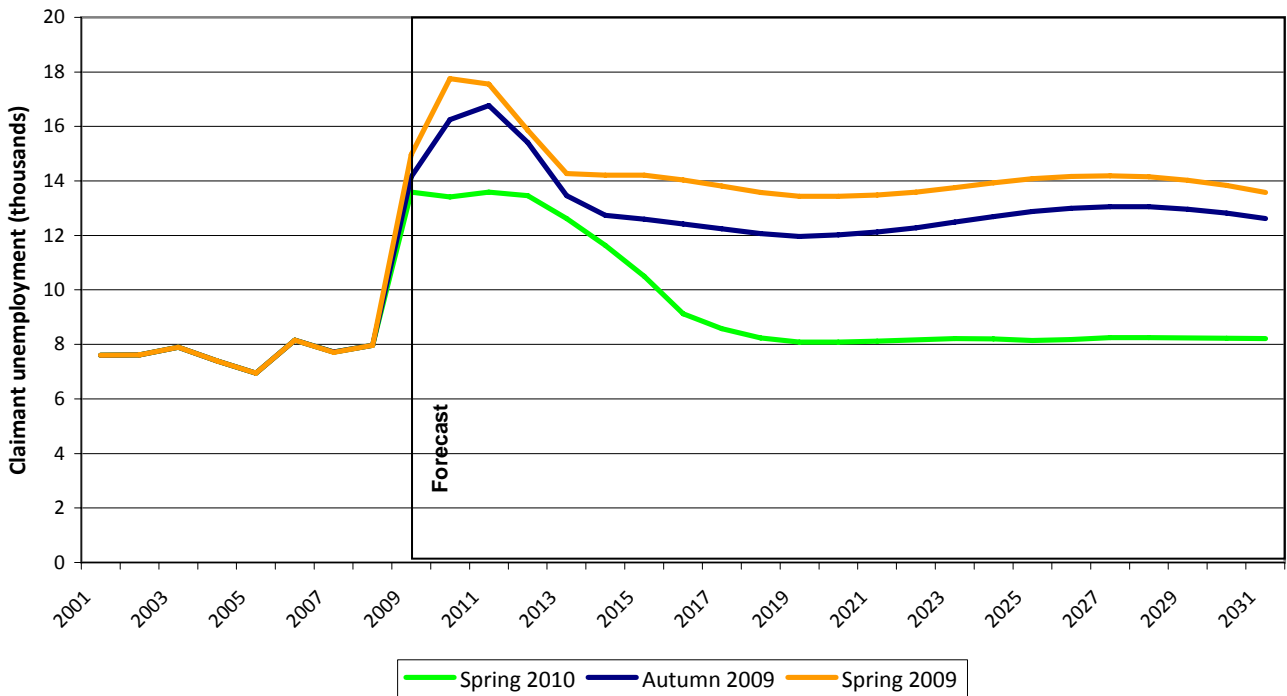
- The spring 2010 run of the East of England Forecasting Model (EEFM), developed by Oxford Economics and Insight East, is now available. Please see <http://insighteast.org.uk/> for information about the model.
- Figures from the latest run suggest that employment in the county will reach a slightly lower trough than forecast by the autumn 2009 run of the model, and the recovery will subsequently be slightly later, with employment returning to its 2006 peak in 2014/2015, a year later than previously forecast. The graph below shows the evolution of the forecasts for the state of the Suffolk economy, including autumn 2007 and spring 2008 runs, which took place prior to the onset of the global recession. The most pessimistic figures were produced by the spring 2009 run, which corroborates with other evidence including the highest level of claimant unemployment in the county during the recession, and large numbers of redundancies being recorded.

Comparison of East of England Forecasting Model outputs - Suffolk - Total employment



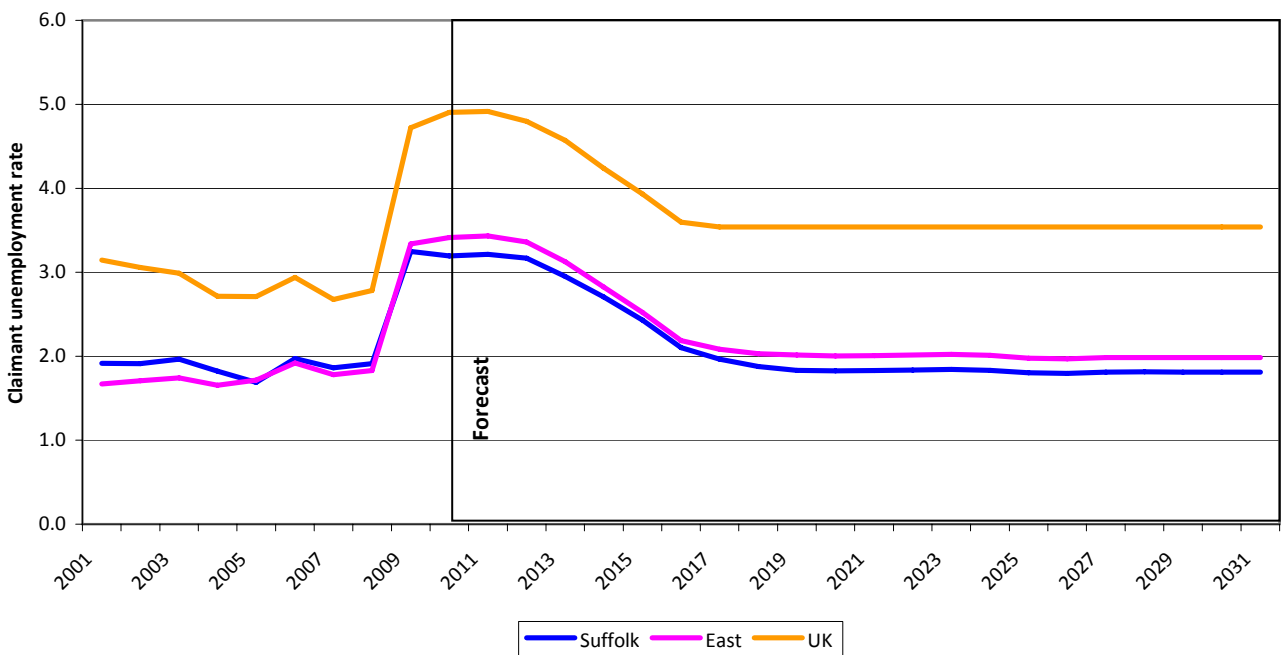
- The latest run also presents the most optimistic picture of forecast unemployment in the county (not including runs prior to 2009 - see graph opposite). Claimant counts over the past year to six months have not been as high as the spring and autumn 2009 runs were forecasting, resulting in a lower unemployment peak and the eventual plateau of the claimant count being at around 8,000 claimants (1.8% of the working age population); similar to pre-recession levels and between 4,000 and 6,000 fewer than forecast by previous runs. However, the model suggests that the decline in claimants will be protracted, with the return to pre-recession unemployment levels not occurring until around 2019. According to previous runs, unemployment would not return to pre-recession levels until beyond 2031.
- It should also be noted that at this stage the model does not try to estimate the impact of public sector funding cuts. There are fears that this could cause unemployment to rise again. Please see <http://insighteast.org.uk/> for more information on the model.

**Claimant unemployment forecast - Suffolk - EEFM**



- Suffolk is forecast to follow a similar trend to the East of England and the country as a whole in terms of the claimant unemployment rate. However, unlike Suffolk, the East of England and the UK are not forecast to return to pre-recession levels of unemployment during the period up to 2031.

**Claimant unemployment rate forecast - Suffolk, East of England and UK**



## INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC TRENDS | IMPORTS & EXPORTS

- Two-thirds of businesses in the region could be missing out on growth by failing to explore opportunities in international markets, according to research. A survey by Lloyds TSB Commercial found that 64% of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are not currently exporting. The findings were highlighted at an event for 120 SMEs staged by the bank at Trinity Park, Ipswich, to provide advice on how companies can grow. Local representatives from UK Trade & Investment delivered a presentation on the fundamentals of getting started in import and export markets, while guidance on funding, managing finances and investing was provided by Lloyds TSB Commercial. Croner, a human resources consultancy, was also at the event, offering information on employment regulation. The research showed more than half of local businesses (55%) have seized the opportunities created by the growth of the internet and have entered the export market by selling directly to end buyers via online channels, mainly targeting customers in the European Union, North America and the Far East, including China. It also confirmed exports are accounting for an increasing proportion of turnover, with 62% of firms having seen income from exported goods or services grow in the last 12 months, 45% expecting an increase this year and 55% predicting the trend to continue into 2011. However, of the SMEs that are not currently involved in international markets, just one in 10 (11%) have plans to begin exporting, suggesting that many firms may be missing out on the potential to boost sales significantly. Steve Elsom, area director for Lloyds TSB Commercial in East Anglia, said: "I hope the event inspired small business owners in Ipswich to fully explore the avenues of growth that are open to them – whether these exist in the UK or abroad. "While exporting may have traditionally been seen as only suitable to companies in industries such as manufacturing, firms operating in other sectors should look closely at new markets and international demand for their products. New technology has opened the borders and means many companies who may not have considered marketing and exporting before or have dismissed it as unfeasible, could find untapped markets are now easily accessible. We organised this event because we recognise SMEs are a vital component of the UK economy and it's crucial they are in a prime position to seize the opportunities a strengthening global economy is likely to bring. It was a fantastic opportunity for firms to share best practice, network, and access guidance and support to gain the confidence and knowledge they require to identify new business opportunities and push forward with their plans for the future." The event was one of 200 being held by Lloyds TSB Commercial as part of its 2012 SME Charter, which aims to encourage enterprise, highlight access to finance and offer clearer pricing. EADT 16/6/10

**KEY CHALLENGES AND HOTSPOTS (E.G. BUSINESS FEEDBACK ON GOVERNMENT POLICY, INVESTMENTS UNDER THREAT, SKILLS SHORTAGES, IMPACT OF BUSINESS CLOSURES, AREA-BASED CHALLENGES...)**

## **BUSINESS SPECIFIC INTELLIGENCE (E.G. REDUNDANCIES, NEW JOBS OR BUSINESSES AT RISK) / INFORMATION ON KEY QUESTIONS\***

### **REDUNDANCY TOTAL**

- According to information from Jobcentre Plus and local press, the total number of redundancies to have taken place in Suffolk since October 2008 now stands at **5,313**.

### **NEW JOBS, EXPANSIONS | REDUNDANCIES, BUSINESSES AT RISK**

#### **COUNTY-WIDE**

- The administrators of Suffolk-based Elizabeth Hotels have confirmed the sale of two more of its properties and say they are optimistic of finding buyers for the rest of the estate.  
The latest hotels to be sold are the Wherry, at Oulton Broad, near Lowestoft, and the Duke's Head at King's Lynn in Norfolk. The sales, both completed this month, follow deals previously agreed by the administrators from accountancy firm KPMG for the Humber Crown Hotel near Hull and the Humber Royal in Grimsby.  
Ipswich-based Elizabeth Hotels Ltd, owned by Suffolk property entrepreneur Richard Cattermole, went into administration last December together with sister companies Cavendish Hotels Ltd and Elizabeth Estates (BS) Ltd.  
Together, the three businesses operated a total of 11 hotels and 13 pubs, most of them located within East Anglia. Hotels still for sale, which the administrators are continuing to trade as going concerns, include the Hotel Elizabeth Copdock, near Ipswich, the Mill Hotel, Sudbury, the Limes Hotel, Needham Market, the Rose and Crown, Haverhill, and Hotel Hatfield, Lowestoft.  
Pubs involved in the administration include the Cock Inn at Polstead, the Three Tuns, Needham Market, the White Hart, Boxford and the Five Bells, Rattlesden.  
A spokesman for the administrators said yesterday: "We are confident of finding buyers for the remaining properties and discussions are at various stages with potential purchasers on the remaining hotels from the group."  
Administrators Allan Graham and Jane Moriarty of KPMG were appointed shortly before Christmas at the request of the Lloyds Banking Group.  
The three businesses in administration form part of Mr Cattermole's Ryan Elizabeth Holdings group. However, the holding company itself, and around 30 other subsidiaries, including the Hotel Elizabeth Orwell in Felixstowe, are not in administration.  
The sale of the hotels is being handled on behalf of the administrators by agent Colliers Robert Barry, which has also previously expressed confidence in finding buyers for the properties. Peter Brunt, head of insolvency sales at the firm said: "The portfolio contains some impressive hotels which has been reflected in the fact that a number of the parties that we are in discussions with are very experienced players in the hotel and leisure industry. We are confident that once sales have been completed the hotels will go from strength to strength."  
The sale of the pubs is being handled by another specialist agent, GVA Grimley, which is also in negotiation with a number of interested parties. EADT 15/6/10

#### **BABERGH**

- A supermarket giant has revealed plans to build a new store in Sudbury which could create up to 300 new jobs for the area.  
National chain Sainsbury's wants to build a new superstore on the former site of the William Armes factory on the outskirts of the town.  
If approved, the new development would consist of a massive retail unit, customer restaurant, a 300-space car park, community recycling centre, improved access and bus stops.  
The firm has also made a commitment to promoting cycling access, as well as landscaping the site in a way that would be sympathetic to its surrounding environment.  
Sainsbury's will be hosting two public meetings next week to unveil its plans for the regeneration of the site

off Cornard Road and to gauge public opinion.

They will be held at the Delphi Sports and Social Club on June 18, from 10.30am to 4pm, and at Sudbury Town Hall on June 19, from 10am to 4pm. Suffolk Free Press 10/6/10

#### **FOREST HEATH**

- Three Mildenhall businessmen have bought the Riverside Hotel in the town and are planning to restore it to its former glory.

Builders are assessing work which will have to be done to the Grade II listed building set on the River Lark which in its heyday hosted many local business meetings and where plays were staged for diners in the hotel's attractive restaurant

The shell of the building has been purchased for 'well over £1million' from Oxford Hotels & Inns who closed the hotel 10 days ago.

Concern was expressed in April about the future of the site after it was revealed that it was up for sale.

The hotel, whose grounds run down to the River Lark, was originally built in around 1720 and the new owners plan to refurbish the Georgian building to restore it to its former glory. They plan to open at the start of the Christmas season. Already there are three weddings booked for the venue.

Keith Lardner, who was a former owner of the hotel in its heyday, has been appointed a consultant for the venture and former employees Ged Sharrocks and Maggie Swift have been appointed as general managers. Peter Merrick, company secretary for The Riverside House Hotel Ltd, said this week that repairs were being done to its main staircase which was collapsing and designers would be coming in to refurbish the 22 bedrooms which have been stripped bare.

Mr Merrick and builder Tony Delaney from Felgate Builders are two of the purchasers but the main buyer has said he does not want any publicity. All three are former hotel customers.

Mr Merrick, who is a trustee of the Mildenhall Museum and whose wife Julie is chairman of the Riverside Theatre Company, said: "We feel this is what the town needs for its businesses. We all want to be able to enjoy the place again. It is sad to see it looking in such a sad state. We would have done anything not to see it close down.

"We want this to be a sensibly priced place in keeping with the area with super locally sourced food, excellent beers and wines as well as providing somewhere for people to enjoy a coffee."

Fears were raised over the hotel after it was put up for sale in April by Oxford Inns who have owned it since September 2006.

The hotel was fined £30,000 last year after admitting seven charges under food hygiene regulations.

The hotel was run by one family for 70 years until 1999. Since then it has changed hands several times. Bury Free Press, 14/5/10

#### **IPSWICH**

- A possible deal to sell insurance giant Axa's UK life and pensions business will not affect its Ipswich general insurance arm if it goes ahead, the company has confirmed.

The French firm has confirmed it is considering the sale of its UK life and pensions business in a £2.75billion deal with insurance buy-out firm Resolution, which owns Friends Provident.

If it goes ahead, the merger would create one of the UK's biggest protection and group pensions businesses. But Sandra McLaughlin, head of media at Axa, confirmed that staff at Ipswich, which number more than 1,000, would not be affected by any potential deal.

"If the deal goes ahead we'll still have a general insurance arm in the UK. It won't affect Ipswich - we'll be maintaining our general insurance arm," she said.

Resolution, which is headed up by insurance entrepreneur Clive Cowdery, bought Friends Provident for just under £2bn last year and is believed to have held discussions with up to nine companies since it was created in 2008.

Axa UK, which has around 10 million UK customers, employs 15,000 staff in the UK. If a deal is reached, the 2,000 employees at its life and pensions arm, based at Bristol and Coventry, would transfer.

Axa said it will retain ownership of its UK wealth management business and keep a presence in the general insurance and healthcare markets in the UK if the deal goes ahead, but stressed there was no certainty it would.

The cost savings stemming from the merger of the Axa UK life and pensions arm and Friends Provident is

expected to involve job losses.

Resolution predicted “significant cost synergies”, mainly from rationalisation of sales and marketing and operations and support costs. EADT 15/6/10

#### **MID SUFFOLK**

- The company behind proposals for a three-turbine wind farm claims it has been left more than £25,000 out of pocket after it was given the wrong location of an underground gas pipe. Windpower Renewables has withdrawn the plans for the green energy site at Eye Airfield on the edge of Eye Industrial Estate, near Yaxley, but managing director Andy Hilton, who blames National Grid for the problem, said he would be re-submitting revised plans at some point in the future. The turbines would generate enough green energy for 5,400 homes and pump power back into the nation’s electricity network. Mr Hilton said a huge amount of money had been wasted on drawing up the plans that have now been pulled, while even more would be spent on tinkering with them before they can be re-submitted to Mid Suffolk District Council. He said: “Unfortunately, National Grid only decided to tell us exactly where the pipeline was about three weeks ago and it was a little closer to our southernmost turbine than we were [originally] told. “Because we have changed the location of the turbine, we have had to withdraw and will re-submit – it’s a bit of a pain.” He said the renewable energy company remained “very positive” about the project and the potential £10,000 community fund it would generate that would be used to pay for projects and facilities in local parishes. The plans did not prove as controversial as other similar projects in Suffolk and of the 39 responses received by the council during the planning consultation process, 25 supported the idea. However, yesterday a National Grid spokeswoman said the pipeline had been correctly identified to Mr Hilton but the energy giant had objected to the location of one of the wind turbines. She said: “We were contacted by the council on February 22 and responded on February 23, objecting to the application because one of the turbines was too close to the gas pipeline. “The map we sent to the council was the same one we provided to Mr Hilton and shows the pipeline in the same location. “As far as we are concerned there isn’t any issue with the location of the pipeline.” EADT 16/6/10

#### **ST EDMUNDSBURY**

- The first week of the World Cup has already helped to deliver a major boost to the region’s economy, business leaders say. Since the competition started many sports stores, supermarkets and pubs have seen an upturn in takings as football fever sweeps the region. Sales of replica England shirts soared in the build up to the country’s opening game against the USA, leaving several sports stores frantically having to re-order new stock. Emma Legge, a store assistant at JD Sports in Bury St Edmunds, said: “It’s been absolutely crazy over the last few days. “We sold so many England shirts in the build-up to the USA game that we actually ran-out at one point and had to re-order another load. People have also bought a lot of footballs and flags as well as replicas of the 1966 England kit. We’re fully re-stocked now and bracing ourselves for another surge before the next England game.” Angela Smith, a store assistant at Starmark Sports in Stowmarket, added: “We have definitely seen a surge in sales of England shirts, hats, banners, flags and footballs. “We expected this would be the case and made sure that we stocked up before the tournament started. Everyone goes football crazy at this time of the year and 2010 has certainly been no different from previous World Cup years.” Pubs and bars across the region experienced an upturn in business especially during England’s opening match against the USA on Saturday – and they’ll be expecting a similar impact again when England take on Algeria this evening. David Gwillim, landlord of the Spread Eagle in Bury St Edmunds, said: “We were heaving on Saturday night. It’s hard to say how many people packed in but I’d guess we were 200% busier than a normal Saturday.” Tom Kelly, assistant manager of the Oak pub in Stowmarket, added: “For a normal Saturday we would take £3,500 but last Saturday we took over £6,000.” Supermarkets also benefited, with Tesco revealing that sales of barbecue products including sausages, burgers and cans of beer had been very high. Dr Peter Funnell, vice-president of the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, said: “Major global events like the current World Cup and the 2012 Olympics provide a direct

boost to parts of the Suffolk economy and encourage a sense of common purpose for us all.

"Football, like business, is a team game and success can only be achieved through hard work and collective effort. As the Suffolk economy comes out of recession we need to work together to create business success and build on the momentum of the World Cup by visibly supporting the efforts and contribution of Team Suffolk." EADT 18/6/10

- The cost of the new Apex venue in Bury St Edmunds has risen to £18.5 million, while a £750,000 land deal has put an end to hopes of a town centre link to the arc.

St Edmundsbury Borough Council papers reveal that the cost of the Apex, the public building on the arc, has risen again - five years ago it was supposed to cost £10.8 million but the cost crept up over the years to £16.5 million and now it is set to be £18.5 million.

The council's deputy leader, Cllr Sara Mildmay-White, said: "When the going gets tough you don't quit. The overspend is incredibly frustrating. We wanted the best and we are getting a fantastic building."

She said the rise was down to the fact they could not get one contractor to do both the main building and internal work. The Apex is due to host its first bookings in September.

St Edmundsbury Borough Council has announced a deal with arc developers Centros, after accepting that the link scheme to widen Market Thoroughfare to encourage arc shoppers into the rest of the town, will not happen.

"Once it became clear that Centros were not going to make the anticipated profits on the arc necessary to widen Market Thoroughfare, the borough council tried everything - including the use of a compulsory purchase order (CPO) - to force them to do so. But frankly, today's economic conditions are very different to those many years ago when we started this process, and have made this impossible," said council leader Cllr John Griffiths.

He added that footfall showed Market Thoroughfare was already working as a link.

Now the council, which cancelled the CPO this week, has accepted a parcel of land from Centros at School Yard off Risbygate Street, valued at around £750,000. Bury Free Press 18/6/10

#### **SUFFOLK COASTAL**

- The decision to shelve a £1.1 billion project to improve the A14 between Ellington, near Huntingdon and Fen Ditton, near Cambridge, is bad news for the Port of Felixstowe, as the road is of national and regional importance in providing a major link between the Port and the Midlands. EADT 18/6/10
- Five stores owned by the Vergo Retail group, including the branch in Felixstowe, are to close on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> June, the company's administrators have confirmed. The remaining 10 stores in the chain, including that in Ipswich, will also close in a week's time unless a buyer is found. Joint administrator Sarah Bell, from insolvency specialist MCR, said that negotiations with prospective purchasers of the 10 remaining stores would continue.

However, she said the closure of the five stores due to cease trading tomorrow had become inevitable following a lack of any suitable offers. "Since the administration began we have worked hard to secure a purchase of the Vergo business," she said. "However, given the tough economic climate and the financial challenges hitting the UK's retail industry, certain Vergo stores can no longer be sustained."

But she added: "I must reiterate that negotiations are still in progress on a number of stores still operating and can not rule out a sale of the stores until all avenues have been exhausted. We encourage any interested parties to come forward urgently."

Unless purchasers are found, the final day of trading for the 10 remaining stores will be Saturday, June 26<sup>th</sup>. Before today's announcement, four stores had already been closed by the administrators while one, in Hexham, Northumberland, has been sold.

A total of 482 employees across the company have been made redundant although the administrators have declined to give any breakdown of the jobs lost in East Anglia. EADT 18/6/10

#### **WAVENEY**

- Lowestoft and Waveney's tourist industry is gearing up for a bumper summer as hopes grow that the district

could be set for one its busiest holiday seasons in years.

Copies of the glossy 2010 Sunrise Coast tourist guides have been sent out in record numbers, and hotel, B&B and guest houses say bookings are already well up on 12 months ago.

Tourism leaders believe that uncertainty over flights caused by the volcanic air-ash chaos, hard-pressed families planning 'stay-at-home' holidays in the economic downturn, and the attraction of Waveney - with its award-winning beaches and affordable, family-friendly activities - has prompted many people to consider the East Coast rather than taking a foreign holiday this summer.

Darren Newman, Waveney District Council's service manager for tourism and events, said: "The feedback we have received from members of the Waveney Tourism Forum has been extremely positive.

"All sections of the industry are doing well but those offering longer stays are doing particularly well."

The news comes just days after the beaches at Lowestoft were recognised as among the finest in the country.

The sandy beaches either side of Claremont Pier have been awarded the prestigious Blue Flag and have received the top "recommended" accolade from the Marine Conservation Society.

At Southwold, the beach, harbour and other attractions including the pier continue to woo visitors.

Stephen Bournes, owner of Southwold Pier, said: "The weather has been a bit up and down early in the season but we have more than matched last year's figures which were really good.

"In fact on some days during May we were having visitor numbers normally associated with July."

Mr Bournes believes the trend is set to continue. "More and more people are happy to take their holiday in England and in Southwold and Waveney we have a real gem," he said.

Hotels and guest houses across Waveney are also reporting a big leap in bookings.

Tony Gittins, chairman of the Lowestoft Tourism Group and owner of The Sandcastle guest house on Marine Parade, said his bookings were up 50pc compared to last year and he was hopeful that things would improve still further. "Things are looking very good for this summer," he said. "I'm 50pc booked up for June, July and August and the bookings are continuing to come in." Mr Gittins said that other hotel and B&B owners in the tourism group, were equally upbeat. "The internet is a big help, but we've also benefited from some great publicity. As well as the Blue Flags for our beaches Lowestoft was described as 'Suffolk's best kept secret' in one national newspaper. "Things like that make a big difference, but we have a great venue. The seafront is our big selling point - in the evening as well as during the day since the lighting was improved," he said.

Mr Gittins said local hotels were also benefiting from the growth of the local offshore wind power industry, as workers based in Lowestoft were filling rooms out of season.

Away from the coast the market towns and villages have a strong appeal to visitors and the tourism guide promotes the wide range of locations to be found in the area.

Major attractions such as Pleasurewood Hills in Lowestoft and Africa Alive at Kessingland are also proving popular with visitors, having invested in facilities for the new season.

The Pontins holiday centre at Pakefield is also set for a multi-million pound improvement and expansion scheme with plans submitted to the district council which will be discussed later this year.

It is estimated that the Sunrise Coast welcomes more than four million visitors to the area each year and that the tourism industry is worth more than £235m to the local economy. Lowestoft Journal 4/6/10

- A Waveney-based business, which helps get unemployed people back into work through a community gardening scheme, has received an award as the UK's fastest-growing social enterprise.

Mow & Grow, based in Lowestoft, is among the organisations included in the RBS SE100, a new index compiled by Royal Bank of Scotland tracking the growth of social businesses.

And with its turnover of more than £1.2million for the last year representing a 710% rate of growth, Mow & Grow is named as the report's national Growth Champion.

Mow & Grow offers gardening services to the elderly and other vulnerable people, with the work being carried by those disadvantaged in the labour market and the community in general, including ex-offenders and the long-term unemployed.

Individuals are referred to its network of franchisees across the country by agencies such as Connexions, the YMCA, JobCentrePlus, the police, the probation service and local colleges.

They embark on a life skills course, incorporated with on-the-job training in gardening and horticulture, so that they gain confidence and, in many cases, qualifications which enable them to obtain conventional employment.

Mow & Grow is part of the Grow Organisation UK group of companies, each offering a wide range of services and training opportunities. Chief executive Alex Cosgrove said: "Each operation is a social enterprise in its own right delivering the same successful model as the original Mow & Grow.

“We engage people by offering them something they enjoy doing and offering recognised training and transferable qualifications, teaching new skills and showing them they are valued.”

The RBS SE100 Index was developed last year by Social Enterprise in partnership with RBS Community Banking. Ian Cowie, chief executive for business and commercial banking at RBS, said: “RBS has been committed to the social enterprise market in UK for over a decade, and we are thrilled to be driving this pioneering initiative.” EADT 11/6/10

- The future of a school site near Lowestoft has come under scrutiny this month. Lothingland Middle School in Lound is set to close next summer as part of the first phase of the move to two-tier education across Waveney. Suffolk County Council has now declared the site “surplus for educational use” and plans to carry out a public consultation before deciding on its future. “Before we take any further action to dispose of the school site, however, we intend to undertake a consultation locally to identify any potential future community use for part or the whole of the site,” a county council spokesman said. “The results of the consultation will be considered by the county council when it makes its decision and will be made available to Waveney District Council (the planning authority) and the general public. “Ultimately, the future of the site will be determined by a planning application by the future user(s).” A consultation evening has been held at Lothingland Middle. People can also visit [www.suffolk.gov.uk/sor](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/sor) to find out how to submit views and suggestions. Any community group that might want to make use of, or acquire, part or the whole of the site must be able to demonstrate: a viable and long term financial plan; that the proposed use meets a recognised but unmet community need; that they have fully considered whether the proposed use could be accommodated at existing schools or other venues in the area. Lowestoft Journal 11/6/10

See the Research and Intelligence Team web pages at:

<http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/CouncilAndDemocracy/AboutSCC/SpecialistSupportFunctions/TransformationAndPerformance/ResearchAndIntelligence.htm> for more data, including Suffolk Trends 2009, which highlights key social, economic and environmental changes for the county in the past year. It highlights where and how change is happening and provides essential contextual data for everyone involved in service development or service redesign.