

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Agenda</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Jackie Gillis</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Walberswick Village Hall</b>

		<b>Paper Number</b>
1.	15.00 Welcome, apologies and housekeeping	
2.	Minutes of previous meeting	<b>LAF 15/17</b>
3.	Declaration of interest	
4.	15.10 Appointment of new chair	
5.	Presentation by EDF on Sizewell C, to include a general update and review of the tourism work stream	<b>EDF Presentation</b>
6.	Coastal Access update	<b>LAF 15/18 AW</b>
7.	Feedback from the ROWIP renewal workshop on 8 <sup>th</sup> July 2015	<b>LAF 15/19 CP</b>
8.	Network Rail Level Crossing Update	<b>LAF 15/20 AW</b>
9.	General Progress Update Report	<b>LAF 15/21 AW</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural England Engagement With Local Access Forums</li> <li>• LAF News 2015/16</li> <li>• SLAF Annual Report to Cabinet</li> </ul>	<b>LAF 15/21 App A &amp; B</b> <b>LAF 15/21 App C</b> <b>LAF 15/21 App D</b>
	Public Question Time	
	17.00 Dates & Venues of 2016 Meetings	

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Minutes of meeting held at Victory Cricket Pavilion, Bury St Edmunds on Thursday 9 July 2015</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>Thursday 22 October 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Jackie Gillis</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Walberswick Village Hall</b>

### 1. **Welcome, apologies and housekeeping**

Present: Bryan Collen (Chair) (BC), David Barker (Vice Chair) (DB), Annette Ellis (AE), Barry Hall (BH), Gordon Merfield (GM), Monica Pipe (MP), Mike Taylor (MT), Margaret Hancock (MA), Alan Moore (AM).

SCC Officers Present: Jackie Gillis (JG) (minutes), Andrew Woodin (AW), Claire Parker (CP), Francesca Clarke (FC).

Members of Public: Gordon Crosby (GC), Mervyn Holden (MH), Graham Henderson (GH)

Apologies: Jane Hatton, Cllr Diana Kearsley, John Wayman, Roland Wilson, Anthony Wright, Melinda Appleby, Cllr Jane Storey.

### 2. **Minutes of previous meeting (LAF15/11)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2015 were reviewed and confirmed to be an accurate record.

AW stated there was an outstanding action from Any Other Business; GM to advise him of locations for required warning signs along the Sandlings Walk.

### 3. **Declaration of interest** - none identified.

### 4. **Coastal Access (LAF 15/12)**

AW summarised the paper.

GM commented he had an issue with signage, in particular, the Sandlings Walk which is not waymarked. The Coastal Trail will require vandal proof signage.

BC agreed that maintenance would be an issue and money should be made available to keep the paths clear, SLAF must impress this upon Natural England.

BH said the paths must be wide enough for mechanical cutting equipment and AM advised that they should be accessible for disabled people using wheelchairs and walking aids. He also questioned which routes would be used. AM also questioned the access along cliff tops for people with impaired vision.

AW advised the existing public footpaths would become the route; where there was currently no public footpath, one would be created. Where routes have been lost owing to coastal erosion, the Coastal Trail will replace those gaps and 'roll back' space will be provided to allow for future erosion.

AW stated that people will need to be aware of natural features. Gates and bridges should be accessible to all. Natural England will fund this within reason but it will be a shared arrangement with SCC.

BC asked about issues with the Environment Agency. AW advised that they will be a key consultee and Natural England will need to take on board their comments and issues along with all the other relevant interest groups. The only people who can object are the landowners. BC conceded this could be an issue with agricultural land valued at about £15,000/acre.

AW confirmed that there would be no spreading room into crops, just a 2-3m width for the trail. He emphasised the path would provide economic value to the area.

Natural England's recent presentation to the Suffolk Coast Forum was discussed and AE asked who made up the Coastal Forum.

BC introduced Graham Henderson of the Coastal Forum and asked him to comment.

GH advised that all the statutory agencies were represented, such as the district councils, Natural England, the Stour and Orwell group; approximately 20 people. It is chaired by David Richard of Waveney District Council. It is a partnership of people and GH said he can send a list of people to BC.

The trail in relation to the estuaries was discussed. BC expressed a strong view the coastal trail should be a continuous land route all along the Suffolk coast and not dependant on ferries. This would give the best user experience. The forum endorsed this view. AW stated that on some stretches it was accepted it would not be possible to have views of the sea.

The forum was asked if they agreed on the 7 principles referred to in LAF15/12 Appendix A.

Point 1 – Generally accepted (with caveat on ferries as before).

Point 2 - The Forum felt that the Suffolk coastline and the Coastal Trail must include the estuaries to enable people to walk the whole route and not be dependent on commercial operators/ferries.

Point 3 – Forum agreed early dialogue to be established with the SWT and RSPB. MT said it would ensure they were appreciative of each other's issues.

Point 4 – Deferred – will be addressed as part of the ROWIP. GM suggested a booklet.

Point 5 – Forum agreed members should meet early with Natural England.

GH expressed his concerns as to whether the funding would cover the costs. AW confirmed that the issue would be reinforced with Natural England.

## **5. Network Rail Level Crossing Update (LAF 15/13)**

AW informed the forum that a Design Panel meeting was being held on 10 July 2015 at Needham Market being attended by Sean Cronin, Richard Scofield and Eliane Algaard of NR along with land owners, parish councillor, SCC Definitive Map Manager and Bridge Engineer. Gordon Crosby and Mervyn Holden were also attending.

Mervyn Holden explained that they want NR to understand the limitations of the site. A map was shown to the group of the level crossing, with the proposed bridge overlaid which emphasised the impact the bridge would have on local residents and users.

GC questioned whether the standard 2.3m height for the underpass could be reduced to 2.1m. This would ensure the tunnel was above the water table and still provide adequate height for users. AW responded SCC's position was that if this was a genuine sticking point it would consider relaxing the standard.

BC stated it might be the way forward to achieve the tunnel option.

## 6. Leader Workshop (LAF 15/14)

MH fed back on the workshop she attended on 11 June 2015 at Braintree. It was 1 of 4 different workshops being held. CP advised there were more being held in the autumn.

The current status of the funds has not been resolved and contracts still need signing. There are 2 local action groups in Suffolk.

BC stated the need to keep an eye on the situation as funding may be available and MH said it would help increase the use of ROW and promote tourism.

AW commented Leader funding could plug the financial gap for stewardship path schemes.

**ACTION: AW** to contact Emily Poole, Natural England, to 1) ask about the proposed Suffolk workshop, 2) express SLAFs interest and 3) note AE's offer to help co-ordinate any project in Suffolk, as Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils were already investigating options.

BC suggested it should be opened up to local tourism offices

## 7. SLAF Annual Report (LAF 15/15)

CP gave an overview of the draft report to the forum.

BC and GM stated the cost of servicing SLAF should be emphasised and it was important to maintain the funding. AW confirmed that Cllr Spicer stated the importance of the funding 3-4 years ago.

AW asked the forum which of the priorities should be emphasised and this was discussed and agreed as Coastal Access, Sizewell C, ROWIP2, Network Rail.

BC commented that there had been a planning committee at St Edmundsbury Borough Council but he had not received an invite.

**ACTION: AW** to check Cllr Clement's offer last year for a SLAF rep to attend St Edmundsbury planning committee meeting.

**ACTION: CP** to circulate draft updated report to the forum for final approval.

## 8. General Progress Update Report

- **Membership**

**ACTION: BC** to write to MA on behalf of SLAF to give thanks for her contributions to the forum and to wish her well.

BC discussed his decision to step down and said he felt it was time for a new Chair and approach for SLAF moving on. He said he has fully enjoyed being part of SLAF and October will be his final meeting.

**ACTION: CP** to check regulations on appointing Chair & Vice Chair.

DB expressed thanks to BC on behalf of the forum, this was endorsed by everyone, and also JG's administration of the forum.

AM stated he too will stand down, due to other commitments and BC thanked him for his valid and notable input; AW also thanked AM on behalf of SCC.

- **Natural England Letter to LAFs**

BC stated the need to make NE aware of the importance of access to the countryside and express the forum's disappointment of their reduce involvement.

**ACTION: AW** to compile letter to NE (cc MPs)

- **Ipswich Waterfront**

AW provided an update as requested by MH at the last meeting. MH explained in her experience of using the area she found the shared space worked well; BC felt it was a good compromise.

*16.50 MP left the meeting.*

- **Ramblers Big Pathwatch**

AW said the results would be a valuable help towards informing the next ROWIP but he wasn't sure how the results would be collated.

BC commented that it was the worst time of year to carry out path inspections as they would be all overgrown.

BH said it would be interesting to see if the information coincided with the BVPI results.

AW confirmed that he has informed the Ramblers that any safety issues identified must be reported to SCC straight away.

- **Suffolk Walking Festival 2015**

AE gave an overview of this year's event and said it was a real endorsement that SCC Chief Executive supported and attended the launch. She said thanks to Karina Coghlin

for all her work on the festival. AE said CP was now involved with the SWF along with AW.

CP stated the funding situation still needs to be clarified to ensure the walking festival is maintained and developed for future years. Norfolk County Council now have a walking festival based on Suffolk's success.

AE commented that the walking festival aligns well with the Suffolk Walking Strategy, of which the Director of Public Health is involved in. AW stated it also aligns with the Year of Walking 2016. It will promote economic and health benefits by encourage people to take up walking.

BC asked if commerce tourism was involved. AE confirmed it had been discussed and there are opportunities to explore.

MH asked if the Challenge Walk would be re-instated and commented on the lack of long distance walks this year. Stepping Out already caters for beginners. AE agreed that there had been a lot of feedback to that effect and it would be looked at.

### **Public Question Time**

GC stated it had been helpful to be able to provide comment on Gipsy Lane when he did.

GH suggested that it would be a benefit for representatives of SLAF to meet the Coastal Forum. BC said they were open to suggestions and it would be considered. He thanked the gentlemen for attending and showing an interest in SLAF.

The group were reminded of the need to set up a meeting with Natural England sometime in August.

### **Dates and Venues of Future Meetings**

Thursday 22 October – Walberswick Village Hall

The meeting closed at 17.00

JG/SCC July 2015  
END

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>
<b>Title: Coastal Access</b>
<b>Meeting Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact: Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue: Walberswick Village Hall</b>

### Background

The Government has put additional funding in place over the next 5 years, to make sure that the England Coast Path is completed by 2020. NE has a duty to create a continuous walking trail around the entire coast of England, with wider access to beaches and open land as appropriate.

### Recent Developments

1. The commencement of work to develop coastal access in Suffolk started officially on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2015,
2. A collaborative agreement is now in place between NE and SCC which covers specific pieces of work which can be measured by delivery. The work covers the provision of sensitive feature data and various forms of expert advice at several stages of the process towards the designation of England Coast Path on two stretches of the Suffolk coast which lie between Hopton-on-Sea to Aldeburgh and the county boundary with Essex near Cattawade Bridge to Shotley Gate. A separate agreement will be put in place for the implementation tasks for the approved stretch of coast path. Other agreements will be made for successive stretches of coast as they gain approval. The agreement lays out the different responsibilities of NE and the county council, the allocation and funding of resources, and a timetable.
3. A meeting took place on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 between officers involved in coastal access from NE and SCC. Sarah Wilson, NE's regional manager, was in attendance. The purpose of the meeting was explain how NE would go about it is duties to deliver coastal access in Suffolk, and achieve the optimal balance between access and conservation. NE's and SCC's respective responsibilities were explained, along with the sensitivities which will be encountered in Suffolk.
4. NE has updated its maps showing the provisional phasing for introducing coastal access in the east of England and Suffolk. Following discussion with SCC, the Stour estuary is now being dealt with in one phase, rather than the Suffolk and Essex shores phased separately as originally proposed. This reflects the Stour being covered by one AONB. Updated maps are shown below.

## Natural England Presentation to SLAF on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015

Last month, SLAF heard a presentation from Fiona Taylor and David Waldram from Natural England, explaining the official scheme under which NE is required to develop coastal access. For each section of coastal access, NE will prepare a report for the Secretary of State, who will measure Natural England's proposals against the scheme, and an inspector will consider objections (which can be made only by land managers) and representations. The Secretary of State has the power to amend the report. Natural England will strike the best balance it can between land management and the public interest, and has the expertise to do this. Habitats Regulations Assessments will be undertaken for relevant sensitive sites and Natural England will consult on locally important sites. Natural England will seek views and advice from Suffolk County Council and all the relevant interests.

Key points noted during the presentation and subsequent Q&As were:

- 54% of visits to the coast are on foot,
- The route of the coastal trail can include sea defences, if public access will not compromise their physical integrity,
- Where a width is defined it will be 4m, but NE can recommend less,
- A view of the sea is the norm, but not essential along the whole route,
- NE has the power to extend coastal access along estuaries to the first crossing point,
- Coastal access along estuaries still have to meet the criteria of the scheme, eg regarding spreading room and striking the right balance between access and conservation,
- Ferries can be considered as a means of coastal access crossing an estuary, depending on the cost/benefit of extending the trail further along to the first fixed crossing point,
- The chairman reiterated SLAF's view on the unviability of using Suffolk's ferries,
- On conservation, NE has an "access case officer" and a "site responsible officer" who will consider the balance between access and conservation,
- Sites, such as Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation may require appropriate assessments to be undertaken,
- Funding was discussed. NE fund 100% of establishment, including any infrastructure, and 75% of future maintenance, based on an established formula,
- The principles of roll back were discussed.

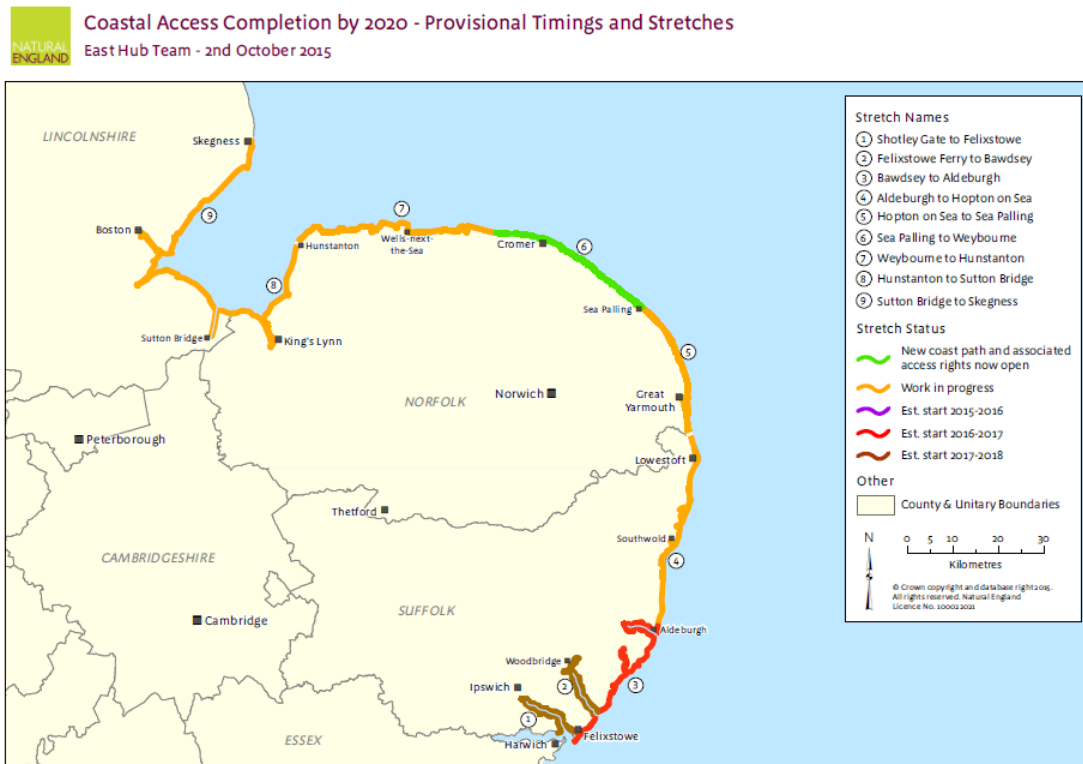
Fiona Taylor welcomed further input from SLAF, this can be flexible and utilise the SLAF working group, and NE will attend future SLAF meetings as appropriate.

### The Working Group

SLAF has agreed a working group for coastal access, and this may require some involvement during the establishment of coast access: Bryan Collen, Annette Ellis, Roley Wilson and Barry Hall.



## Coastal Access Map – East Coast



## Coastal Access Map – The Stour



Miscellaneous

The Scheme (methodology) for establishing coastal access can be found here:

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5327964912746496?category=50007>

and a glossary of terms can be found here:

*publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/91018*

END  
AW/SCC October 2015

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>
<b>Title: Rights of Way Improvement Plan</b>
<b>Meeting Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact: Claire Parker</b>
<b>Venue: Walberswick Village Hall</b>

This paper is a record of the forum's meeting in July at which members started to scope priorities for the next improvement plan.

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>
Title: Feedback from ROWIP 2 Consultation Session
Meeting Date: 9 July 2015
Contact: Claire Parker
Venue: Bury Cricket Pavilion
Attendees: David Barker (Vice Chair), Annette Ellis, Monica Pipe, Margaret Hancock.
SCC Officers Present: Jackie Gillis (JG) Andrew Woodin (AW), Claire Parker (CP), Francesca Clarke (FC).

Every Highway Authority in England has a statutory Duty to produce and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and Local Access Forums are statutory consultees in the process. The current Suffolk ROWIP expires in 2016 and the ROWIP 2 (2016 -2026) needs to be drafted. A session was held immediately before the scheduled SLAF meeting on July 9<sup>th</sup> 2015 to begin discussions between Suffolk County Council and the SLAF. The session was interactive and informal and covered

- The purpose of the ROWIP
- A review of the ROWIP 1
- The role of the SLAF in producing RWIP 2
- Constraints and drivers impacting on the ROWIP 2
- Group sessions to tease out priorities from SLAF members and their represented interest groups.

The session identified a range of common interests from amongst the group which were condensed into three key themes/priorities.

- **Infrastructure**
- **Health, inclusion and schools**
- **Promotion**

Sessions were conducted to focus thinking on these themes, explore the potential within them and draw out six specific action points for each. A voting session highlighted those actions considered to be of a higher priority within the context of shrinking resources. The group discussed how the current economic climate will mean that the ROWIP action plan will have to prioritise rather than being able to address every action.

The prioritised action points were as follows, and are listed in order of importance. Please note each attendee had three votes only, making a total of 24 ?? votes.

### Infrastructure

Action	Votes
Develop strategies to engage local communities to maintain the network. eg through a Warden Scheme	7
Ensure removal of all physical barriers such as stiles to create more accessible routes	5
Improve and extend the bridleway network	4
Maintain the network with signage and way markers etc	4
Work with Parishes and Towns to access external funds	2
Provision of short walks which join up and create longer routes	2

### Health, inclusion and Schools

Plan for healthy communities in larger developments	8
Make it easier to walk/cycle to school	8
Increase usage of network by minority groups	3
Better understand how to make walk/cycling/horse riding more relevant to non users	2
work collaboratively with other service areas such as Public Health	2
Work with BHS to promote horse riding	1

### Promotion

Coastal Access: Develop and promote brand. Protect the asset	6
Integrate ROW projects into National Curriculum for schools	5
Promote the network to non traditional users	4
Walking Festival: Develop brand and develop targeted walks eg 'Bhaji on the Beach'	4

Develop more robust relationships with the media/tourism sector. Promote more good news stories	<b>3</b>
Develop website and innovative technology to promote use of network	<b>1</b>

During the session SLAF members were able to share their thoughts with the wider group. Vice Chair David Barker requested some time be spent reviewing the ROWIP 1 against it's current objectives. The objectives were given a score out of 10 according to the level to which the group felt they had been achieved. The results were as follows

Objective	Score
A. Provide a better signed, maintained and accessible network	9/10
B. Provide and protect a more continuous network that provides for the requirements of all users	6/10
C. Develop a safer network	7/10
D. Increase community involvement in improving and managing the network	6/10
E. Provide an up to date and publicly available digitalised Definitive Map for the whole of Suffolk	3/10
F. Improve promotion, understanding and use of the network	8/10

The group discussed that this session was the very beginning of the process. The next step for the highways authority is to undertake a public consultation which will include a web based survey of user groups, non user groups, stakeholders, and councillors. The SLAF will receive regular updates on progress through the SLAF meeting and further opportunities to consult with the SLAF directly will be built into the project plan.

END  
CP/SCC October 2015

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>
<b>Title: Network Rail – Public Rights of Way Level Crossings</b>
<b>Meeting Date: 22 October 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact: Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue: Walberswick Village Hall, The Street, Walberswick, Suffolk IP19 6TZ</b>

## Introduction

This paper updates the forum on the main level crossings being addressed by Network Rail (NR) and Suffolk County Council (SCC).

## Needham Market Gipsy Lane and FP6



Further to the update provided at the Forum's July meeting, the Design Panel met for the first time on 10<sup>th</sup> July at Needham Market's Community Centre. At this inaugural meeting, the terms of reference were agreed and NR's appointed consultants, WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff (WSP PB), presented an outline of the scope for their investigations of the remaining options. At its second meeting on 15 September, WSP

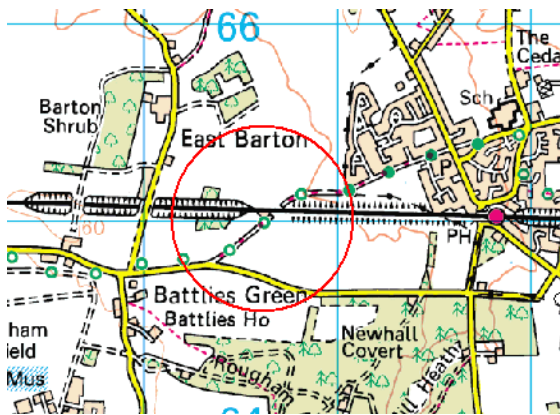
PB presented their initial investigations into the options. **A further, previously unidentified option, was tabled.** This would entail diverting the Gipsy Lane crossing to an existing 'dual tunnel' railway underpass near the Badley road bridge, which carries a tributary of the River Gipping. The approximate location of the underpass is indicated on the above plan by the inset diamond. This option will require further detailed discussion.

The Panel intends to meet again in early November, when WSP PB will present their detailed options findings, including visualisations of the ramped footbridge and underpasses, at differing gradients (3x underpass @1:12 @1:15 @1:20, and 2x bridge @1:15 @1:20). The options will be subsequently presented at public exhibition events on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> (4-8pm) and Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> (11am-3pm) November, to be held at Needham Market Community Centre. There will be visualisations of the options, together with reasons as to why some have been de-selected.

Following this, a further Panel meeting will be arranged to review the public feedback and discuss the decision making process. NR have also previously committed to come back to the local community with the worked up designs for the grade separated options and this will take place sometime in early 2016.

SCC officers of the view the new crossing option needs serious consideration but the route proposed will be off-putting to path users who, for whatever reason want a shorter walk or the more direct route to Creting which they currently enjoy. To mitigate this loss would require significant betterment to the network, which could be justified by the significant savings to NR of not constructing an underpass or bridge at the site of the level crossing.

### Great Barton Bridleway 12



The NR documentation on the transfer and first registration of the land south of the railway was only received by SCC on 21 September. On 2 October NR confirmed the creation agreement was ready to be executed but have further advised their Property department need to grant approval and this will take at least another four weeks.

As previously advised, SCC has undertaken all the necessary consultations for the Rail Crossing Extinguishment Order (RCEO) for the short length of at-grade bridleway, which will be made and advertised once the creation agreement is executed.

### Cotton Footpaths 13 and 15



As part of its investigations, the county council has identified that there is no known landowner for part of FP 13, the land being unregistered. This ought to have been identified by NR in advance of their Rail Crossing Extinguishment Order (RCEO) application submissions. SCC sought special dispensation from the Secretary of State (SoS), in relation to the statutory requirement to serve the notices on all affected landowners. This was granted at the beginning of October. The county council will now proceed to undertake the necessary consultations.



## General/Countywide

Further to the SCC/NR liaison meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> April, NR have subsequently circulated their Anglia Route Level Crossing Reduction Strategy (covering six counties/unitary authorities). This sets out a five phased strategy for reducing their portfolio of railway level crossings, using powers under the Transport and Works Act, for which they will be applying to the SoS.

SCC met NR and their consultants on 1 October to discuss the overall approach and their individual crossing proposals for Suffolk. Phases I and II intend to address those rights of way level crossings where there is little or no usage and/or there are safer, grade separated alternatives nearby. In addition, five road downgrades to footpath status are proposed. The county council has indicated its objection to this, requesting a minimum of bridleway status be retained. This will provide for future proofing of the network, allowing for future improvements that meet the council's health & wellbeing policies and cycling strategies.

Later phases will seek to address those level crossings (rights of way and roads) where bridges or tunnels are needed.

NR have indicated the proposals are commercially sensitive at the moment but have confirmed that the Forum will be included as a pre-consultee, when they're in a position to start their consultations.

During all the ongoing discussions with NR, SCC officers have drafted the following guiding principles, upon which it invites SLAF's comments:

1. Public rights of way are valuable county council as well as public assets and this should be considered in any discussions relating to the closure of level crossings.
2. Usage – usage of Right of Way level crossings is affected by many factors and cannot be compared to road level crossings. There is a significant difference in the benefits experienced by a user between recreational and business use.
3. There should be no downgrade of road level crossings to less than bridleway status. This is to ensure the level crossing is future proofed against development and other opportunities on the other side of the railway and is in line with Suffolk County Council's greenest county and health and well being policies.
4. Level crossings shown as private may have unrecorded public rights, and be used as such. Network Rail should investigate this when considering a closure.
5. Ramps should be provided wherever possible rather than steps when new infrastructure is required, for the same reasons given in 2. above. [Furthermore, consideration should be given to the needs of the highway authority in maintaining the network beyond the level crossing.]

6. No level crossing should be closed or diversions agreed without understanding the impact on the wider network, including at nearby level crossings.
7. Diverting public rights of way can impose new maintenance costs onto the highway authority. The county council will seek compensation for this from Network Rail, possibly in the form of a commuted sum.
8. Network Rail should satisfy itself that there is no other railway infrastructure in the area of a proposed level crossing closure, for example large culverts or underpasses, that may lie hidden from view, before proposing level crossing closures and public right of way diversions.
9. Where Network Rail propose closing a level crossing and diverting users to another level crossing, assurance should be given that this level crossing will not be closed at a later date without a suitable alternative being provided,
10. That each level crossing proposal will need to be assessed on its own merits but diversionary routes should be both safe and commodious,
11. Negative impacts on local tourism and businesses arising from level crossing closures should be considered,
12. Some proposed diversions will potentially impact on sensitive environmental and archaeological sites and these will need to go through their own separate assessments/consents,
13. The local planning authority should be engaged where level crossing proposals may be affected by future development.

END  
AW/SCC October 2015

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>
<b>Title: General Paper</b>
<b>Meeting Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact: Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue: Walberswick Village Hall</b>

## Introduction

This paper summarises progress on other items of interest to the forum.

## Natural England Engagement With Local Access Forums

1. Following the last meeting, SLAF wrote to NE expressing concerns around funding and commitment. The letter and response is attached at the end of this paper.
2. Encouragingly, NE's local office has contacted regional local access forums to request dates for a regional chairs' meeting. The email is below and SLAF is requested to nominate delegates:

**From:** Healey, Carolyn (NE) [<mailto:carolyn.healey@naturalengland.org.uk>]

**Sent:** 13 October 2015 09:18

**To:** [lizzie\\_barnicoat@hotmail.com](mailto:lizzie_barnicoat@hotmail.com); [lottie.carlton@broads-authority.gov.uk](mailto:lottie.carlton@broads-authority.gov.uk); [cambslaf@lgs-services.co.uk](mailto:cambslaf@lgs-services.co.uk); [caroline.romans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.romans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk); [secretary@essexlaf.org.uk](mailto:secretary@essexlaf.org.uk); [Fiona.Lai@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Fiona.Lai@hertfordshire.gov.uk); [kirsty.webber-walton@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:kirsty.webber-walton@norfolk.gov.uk); [KMacLeavy@mgwsp.co.uk](mailto:KMacLeavy@mgwsp.co.uk); [peterboroughlaf@gmail.com](mailto:peterboroughlaf@gmail.com); Suffolk Local Access Forum; [Pwatts@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Pwatts@thurrock.gov.uk)

**Subject:** Action: Local Access Forum Chairs meeting

Dear all

With all the recent changes within Natural England it has been a while since we were last able to bring the Local Access Fora in our area together to share news information and good practice. I am keen to hear if you would like to attend a LAF chairs/secretaries meeting in the not too distant future to update colleagues and share ideas. We are able to offer a room for the meeting, administration and a light lunch.

In order to ensure we have rooms available I have provisionally booked the following dates.

Please could you confirm with my colleague Carolyn Healey [carolyn.healey@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:carolyn.healey@naturalengland.org.uk)

Will you be attending the LAF meeting?

Who else would be attending from your forum?

Which of the dates below you are available to attend?

Any items for the agenda?

Dates as follows:

25<sup>th</sup> November. Natural England Cambridge Office

15<sup>th</sup> December Natural England Cambridge Office

Please can you get back to us by Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November.

Thank you

Chris Gordon  
Senior Adviser  
Hertfordshire Team, Essex, Cambridge, Herts, Beds and Northamptonshire  
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Peterborough  
PE1 1NG

3. NE is also seeking views on holding LAF national conferences. Andrew Woodin emailed members on 16th September 2015. Possible dates being put forward are between 22 February 2016 to 6 March 2016 (avoiding school half term 15 February to 21 February). Again, SLAF is encouraged to take part in this important annual event.

## **LAF News 2015/16**

This extract appeared in issue no. 7 of LAF News:

### **Campaign to Improve Safety on New Section of Trunk Road**

By Andrew Woodin, Suffolk Rights of Way and Access Manager

Following a long running and hard fought campaign by Suffolk Local Access Forum and local equestrians, a new non-motorised underpass was officially opened to the public on 12th December 2014, as part of the opening of the A11 Fiveways to Thetford trunk road scheme. Patrick McLoughlin, Secretary of State for Transport, opened the new road, part of which bypasses the village of Elveden.

The new road cuts through Thetford Forest in the Brecks, an area of high landscape value. Previously, the A11 acted as a barrier to the exceptional access this part of the Brecks has to offer. With the construction of the new underpass, the public can now walk and ride safely between the areas of heathland and woodland near the monument, and people using the A11 will be able to stop in the nearby laybys and use the underpass to see and learn more about this historic memorial. The county council will be promoting the underpass as part of a Brecks Breaking New Ground project to publicise the rides between Brandon and West Stow country parks and the village of Icklingham...

Originally, there would have been no safe access at all across the new road, but the local access forum was not prepared to accept this and, following meetings with the Highways Agency and Suffolk County Council, secured agreement to include an underpass within the scheme, at an estimated cost of c. £1m, with a financial contribution of c.£300,000 from the county council. The total scheme cost was c. £102m.

Encouragingly, two recreational cyclists from Somerset who were in the area enjoying the access network, also became part of the event when they tried to cycle through the underpass and found it blocked by dignitaries and ribbon!



Matthew Hancock, local MP, cutting the underpass ribbon



Suffolk LAF members Jane Hatton (representing equestrians), Bryan Collen (Chair), David Barker (vice Chair) and Anthony Wight (representing cyclists)

### **SLAF Annual Report to Cabinet**

Bryan Collen made his final presentation of SLAF's annual report to the county council's Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015. The report was very well received and Bryan was thanked for his dedication and time as chair, and the successes of the forum. The paper and minutes are attached.

### **SLAF Meeting Dates 2016**

SLAF is asked to set meeting dates for 2016.

END  
AW/SCC October 2015

**SLAF**  
**Suffolk Local Access Forum**

SLAF  
PO Box 872  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
IP1 9JW

James Cross  
Chief Executive  
Natural England  
4th Floor, Foss House, Kings Pool,  
1-2 Peasholme Green  
York  
YO1 7PX

Tel: 01473 264759  
Fax: 01473 216877  
Email: [slaf@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:slaf@suffolk.gov.uk)  
Web: <http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/suffolk-local-access-forum/>

Your Ref:  
Our Ref:  
Date: 6 August 2015

Dear Mr Cross

**Re: Local Access Forums**

At its meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2015, the Suffolk Local Access Forum considered an item on Natural England's engagement with local access forums. This was prompted by the letter of 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015 from your Area 8's Access and Partnerships Team to the Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF). In the letter, it was explained that whilst promoting access to and understanding of the natural environment is one of NE's four key areas of business, its statutory access role is limited to receiving copies of local access forum annual reports and being notified of changes made to forum arrangements and changes in the Secretary.

The letter explained pressure on resources has meant NE is no longer able to fund the LAF Regional Co-ordinators post or organise Regional Chair meetings, which were useful forums to exchange good practice, ideas and news from NE.

SLAF understands that continuing pressures on government budgets means priorities have to be reassessed but is concerned that the significant domination of biodiversity and conservation in NE's priorities for the period 2014 to 2019 (only one the 9 priorities relates to access) means that when difficult decisions have to be made, resources will be diverted to conservation at the expense of access. Combined with continuing pressures on local authority budgets, the result is likely to be a deterioration in the quality of access to the countryside, at the very time that the health and economic benefits of walking and cycling, and the natural environment, are becoming more and more evident.

An example of how NE will balance access and conservation can be seen in the introduction of coastal access in Suffolk. SLAF wants to see a continuous land-based route, including along the estuaries. SLAF fully recognises the value of the sensitive habitats present along one or two of the estuaries, but considers people's ability to enjoy wildlife, as well as the new rights of access to the coast, are at least as important. Of course NE has to go through the proper processes as described in the coastal access

scheme, but SLAF would hope and expect that, where habitats are too sensitive to support a coastal trail, NE will use its best endeavours to find the nearest alternative route, such that Suffolk can still have a continuous trail.

In conclusion, the Suffolk Local Access Forum would ask that:

1. Where Natural England is advising on conservation you give equal regard to the priority you have given to promoting and encouraging access to and understanding of the natural environment,
2. You ensure highway, access and other local authorities have proper regard to the advice of LAFs, especially when your capacity to champion access is more limited.

Yours sincerely

Bryan Collen  
Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

cc : Andy Mackintosh (NE), Foss House, Kings Pool, 1-2 Peasholme Green, York  
Rory Stewart MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs, Noble House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR  
SLAF

25.08.15  
Ref – LN/JB



SLAF  
Suffolk Local Access Forum  
PO Box 872  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
IP1 9JW

Natural England  
2nd Floor,  
Arndale House,  
Manchester,  
M4 3AQ

Dear Mr Collen

Local Access Forums.

Thank- you for your letter of the 6th August to James Cross, regarding the importance of Local Access Forums ( LAFs) and the role of Natural England in relation to access, which he has asked me to respond to on his behalf.

Firstly I would like to reassure you that we continue to value and recognise the important role that LAFs play in encouraging and ensuring good quality access provision in their areas. Although we are no longer able to support individual LAFs directly, we do want to continue to help the LAFs share ideas and best practice and we set up the Huddle system to enable this to happen. I also know that the LAF network has valued the national conferences we have held in previous years and we are looking to hold at least one event this year.

With regard to our wider access role, this continues to be an important aspect of our work and although we have to prioritise activity across our remit we have a strong programme of work in this area which as well as the flagship English Coastal Path programme includes:-

- Working with Defra to draft guidance to implement the rights of way provisions of the Deregulation Act 2014. This should result in many Rights of Way being added to the definitive map before the cut-off date of 2026;
- Supporting the maintenance and promotion of National Trails;
- Supporting the British Horse Society to conduct a new trial of self-closing bridleway gates, including trialling their operation by all users and to control stock;
- At a local level, continuing to seek improvements to access, especially on sites where we are also





- working to improve biodiversity; and
- Providing open access on our National Nature Reserves, where this is appropriate.

On coastal access, the programme is just getting underway in Suffolk and I note the LAFs desire to see an inland route around the estuaries involved. Our starting assumption for the programme is that the England Coast Path should form a continuous route around the coast and we will be looking very carefully at how this can be achieved in Suffolk over the coming months. We will be following the approach set out in our Coastal Access Scheme, which starts with preliminary investigation and conversations, including with the Suffolk LAF on 17th September.

Where an inland route is chosen around an estuary, the same principles of trail alignment apply as for open sections of coast. Many of our estuaries are important areas for wildlife, including overwintering birds, and possible sensitivities to the presence of visitors in the coastal environment will be taken into account as we develop our proposals. In particular, we (and other statutory bodies) have strong obligations in respect of Natura 2000 sites and where necessary our proposals for coastal access must include appropriate protection. Where we find that there might be a negative impact, our approach is to build in mitigation measures as we develop our proposals, including the use of informal management techniques and careful selection of the detailed trail alignment. I'm pleased to say that our experience with the programme so far has been positive, with the introduction of coastal access often providing opportunities to improve access management for the benefit of people and wildlife.

Please be reassured that we will be consulting with Suffolk LAF during the process and are keen to benefit from your local knowledge and experience of access as we develop our proposals.

Your local Natural England contact is Lynda Foster, telephone number 0300 060 1161 and she would be happy to come along to a meeting of the Suffolk LAF to talk about Natural England's local work if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely



Liz Newton  
Director Landscape, Access and Geodiversity

## Cabinet

<b>Report Title:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	15 September 2015
<b>Lead Councillor(s):</b>	Councillor James Finch
<b>Local Councillor(s):</b>	All Councillors
<b>Director:</b>	Geoff Dobson, Director of Resource Management
<b>Assistant Director or Head of Service:</b>	Alan Thorndyke, Head of Highway Network Management
<b>Author:</b>	Andrew Woodin 01473 264753

### Brief summary of report

1. This is the annual report of the Suffolk Local Access Forum.

### What is Cabinet being asked to decide?

2. The Cabinet is asked to accept the 2014/15 annual report of the Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF) and to note the report's recommendations and the action that the Council is taking to address these recommendations.

### Reason for recommendation

3. The Suffolk Local Access Forum is a statutory, independent body whose purpose is to advise on making improvements to public access for outdoor recreation and sustainable travel. It is required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to submit an annual report on rights of way and access matters to the Council. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs guidance states: "We would expect the authority to respond positively to the forum's annual report and to say what actions they have taken on the advice and recommendations of the forum."

### What are the key issues to consider?

1. The key issues raised by the Suffolk Local Access Forum 2014/15 report are as follows:
  - a) **Investment** – The forum believes public rights of way and green access are a high priority in delivering key objectives of the council, including supporting the local economy and health and wellbeing objectives of getting more people walking and cycling. The forum notes the reduction in the Rights of Way and Access budget in 2015 and understands pressures on council budgets, but would urge the county council to consider the longer term impact on its economic and health priorities. The service has

shown how it can make real improvements to people's lives by the work and projects it has delivered.

The forum further considers its advice and other activities provide a cost effective advisory service to the council and other organisations.

**SCC response:** The Council recognises the role that green access plays in providing opportunities for active lifestyles and enhancing the county's tourism potential, and will maintain appropriate levels of funding to support front line use of this service. The Council further recognises and welcomes the forum's advice and wider input and value for money.

- b) **Network Rail** – The forum places great emphasis on the potential impact of closing public rights of way level crossings on users' ability to access local services, visit the natural environment and maintain a healthy lifestyle. The forum has met with Network Rail a number of times to express these concerns, especially with regard to the Gipsy Lane crossing in Needham Market. The forum played a significant part in compelling Network Rail in February this year to finally abandon its plans to replace the level crossing there with a steps only footbridge. This work will continue and forum urges the Council to resist closing level crossings without suitable replacement crossings being provided.

**SCC response:** The Council thanks the forum for its input and wants to see safer level crossings and faster travel times on the county's railways. It will work with Network Rail to ensure the right balance is struck between safety, travel times and accessibility when proposals are put forward to close individual level crossings.

- c) **Sizewell C** – The forum believes that Sizewell C should have minimal impacts on the rights of way network during construction and should maximise enhancements to access to meet current and future needs of residents and visitors as a legacy of the development. This includes developing a safe cycling route between Aldeburgh, Minsmere Westleton and Dunwich. The forum received a presentation from EDF in April and expressed its disappointment that the planning permission granted at Aldhurst Farm earlier this year did not allow for an off road provision for walkers and cyclists to avoid Lovers Lane.

**SCC response:** The Council remain committed to ensuring the development of Sizewell C benefits local communities and visitors to the area with a significantly enhanced countryside access network.

- d) **ROWIP 2** – The Suffolk Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a statutory plan spanning 2006 to 2016. Local access forums have a duty as statutory consultees to advise on these plans. The forum has begun this process and is helping officers to identify future priorities, including:

- Maintaining, improving and developing the infrastructure, and involving local communities in this,
- Developing and managing work streams to deliver improved health, develop inclusion and engage/support schools with green access eg through safer routes to school, especially through the planning process,

- Promoting the green access network and its benefits against wider agenda areas.

**SCC response:** the Council looks forward to working with the forum in developing the next improvement plan and thanks it for its input thus far.

- e) **Coastal Access:** The forum has noted the Government's new 2020 deadline for completion of the English Coast Path and that Natural England intend for work to begin in Suffolk this year. The forum is committed to helping ensure that Suffolk's coastal trail delivers the best experience for residents and tourists and will work with Natural England and the county council to achieve this.

**SCC response:** The Council is committed to working with Natural England and other coastal partners to ensure the right balance is struck between access and other interests along the coast and estuaries.

### **What are the resource and risk implications?**

4. The Suffolk Local Access Forum considers that the Council should maintain an effective level of funding for rights of way and access maintenance and improvement. The Director of Resource Management will consider and discuss with the Cabinet Member for Roads and Transport the appropriate level of Suffolk County Council funding for the public rights of way and access network in looking at the priorities for Council revenue and capital budgets, recognising the contribution to healthy and sustainable communities and the benefits to the rural economy that these can provide.

### **What are the timescales associated with this decision?**

5. Not applicable.

### **Alternative options**

6. Cabinet could change the responses given by Suffolk County Council to the recommendations from the Suffolk Local Access Forum, or could suggest additional issues that it would like the forum to explore over the coming year.

### **Who will be affected by this decision?**

7. Officers acting on these recommendations and potentially users of public rights of way both resident and visiting, land managers and communities within Suffolk.

## **Main body of report**

### **Introduction**

8. As required by the Local Access Forum (England) Regulations 2002 I have pleasure in submitting the twelfth Annual Report of the Suffolk Local Access Forum to Suffolk County Council as the highway authority.

9. The forum is made up of individuals with a keen interest in rights of way and countryside access. Members represent walking, cycling, horse riding, communities, sport, access for the disabled, tourism, rural businesses, nature conservation, land management and land ownership. All our members want to see improved public access to the natural environment and more sustainable access to services. We see the green access network, eg public rights of way, open access and coastal access, as an invaluable health and economic resource and of increasing importance in delivering key objectives of the authority.

The forum believes rights of way offer a cost effective means of delivering objectives and would like the authority to retain appropriate levels of investment in public rights of way to maintain front line use of this service.

10. SLAF are an independent body with their own letter heading and PO address box, an independent email address and a dedicated page on One Suffolk; <http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/suffolk-local-access-forum>. Full membership for 2014/15 is listed below in Appendix A.

Suffolk County Council's Rights of Way and Access team administers the forum.

### The Work of SLAF

11. The forum met at quarterly intervals in 2014/15 to discuss a wide range of issues that had arisen from consultations, presentations, papers, reports and site visits. The cost of supporting the forum in this period, eg expenses, room hire, was less than £1000, excluding officer time.
12. Members of the public are able to attend meetings and have the opportunity to raise items or comment on issues discussed or related to countryside access. Local parish councils are alerted to SLAF meetings in their area and invited to attend.
13. Topics covered by SLAF in 2014/15 and not covered in para 3 are covered below.
14. **Suffolk Walking Festival:** The forum supports efforts by officers to deliver the 2015 Suffolk Walking Festival and plan for 2016's, and promote countryside access and encourage use of public rights of way. The forum are very encouraged that the event has grown significantly over the years and become established as a key Suffolk event supporting tourism and promoting physical activity.
15. **Opening of A11 Underpass:** The A11 Fiveways to Thetford trunk road and non motorised user underpass was officially opened in December 2014. Due to their hard fought campaigning throughout this scheme the SLAF have helped set a precedent for new road schemes involving PROW and have been instrumental in reconnecting access in the Brecks. The focus of attention has now moved to the threat of closing public rights of way railway level crossings without suitable alternatives being provided.
16. **Suffolk Walking Strategy:** The forum supported, and members contributed to, the development of the Walking Strategy and continue to be involved in supporting the successful implementation of the Suffolk Walking Strategy. The

forum asks that the county council take full advantage of the value of walking in the natural environment in improving people's physical and mental well being.

17. **Natural England:** The Forum has written to the chief executive of Natural England to express its concern about the reduced resources being committed to local access forums and access generally. The forum believes this is likely to result in a deterioration in the quality of access to the countryside, at the very time that the health and economic benefits of walking and cycling, and the natural environment, are becoming more and more evident.

### **Meetings**

18. SLAF members have held meetings as follows
  - 16 October 2014 Victory Cricket Pavillion Bury St Edmunds
  - 29 January 2015 Castle Hill Community Centre Ipswich
  - 23 April 2015 Hill View Business Park Claydon nr Ipswich
  - 9 July 2015 Victory Cricket Pavillion Bury St Edmunds

### **Presentations**

19. SLAF have received presentations on:
  - Sizewell C: Judith Linnane, EDF Energy Alastair Kratt LDA Design
  - The Rights of Way Improvement Plan

### **Consultations**

20. SLAF have been consulted on:
  - EDF Sizewell C User survey form
  - The Rights of Way Improvement Plan

### **Site Visits**

21. SLAF members have made site visits to
  - Elveden – A11 NMU underpass opening in December 2014

### **Conferences/Training**

22. SLAF have been represented at a LEADER workshop to explore sustainable solutions through the promotion of tourism and access along the rivers of the area and on the coast and in the AONB.

### **Membership of SLAF**

Membership of the forum at the end of this report period stood at 16.

### **Working Groups**

In order to be able to respond more effectively to priority access areas between meetings, the forum has agreed the following working groups:

Topic	Membership
Network Rail	Bryan Collen, Roley Wilson, Diana Kearsley
Sizewell C	Margaret Hancock, Anthony Wright, Roley Wilson
Forests and Woodlands	Melinda Appleby, Alan Moore
Open Access	Barry Hall, Gordon Merfield, Mike Taylor
ROWIP and Suffolk Walking Strategy	Annette Ellis, Roley Wilson, Jane Hatton, Diana Kearsley, Monica Pipe
Coastal Erosion and Access	Bryan Collen, Annette Ellis, Roley Wilson, Barry Hall
Planning and Development	Jane Storey, Jane Hatton, Anthony Wright
Agri-Environment Schemes	David Barker, John Wayman

23. The forum's priorities over the coming year will include those listed in para 3. In addition, the forum will seek to widen its understanding of sources of potential external funding, eg through larger developments and the local enterprise partnerships.

### **Bryan Collen**

Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

### **David Barker**

Vice Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

**July 2015**

**Suffolk Local Access Forum – Members’ Details****Appendix A**

**Bryan Collen** (Chair) – Bryan has been involved in the NFU, Anglian Water, Internal Drainage Boards and the County Council’s Rights of Way Liaison Committee. *Bryan has been Chair of SLAF since April 2010.*

**David Barker** (Vice Chairman) – With his wide experience within the NFU, CLA and as a former Countryside Agency commissioner, David seeks to work to balance all interests in countryside access. David is also Chair of Creating the Greenest County. *David has been Vice Chair of SLAF since April 2010.*

**Melinda Appleby** – Since childhood Melinda has had an interest in wildlife and conservation. With a degree in Rural Environmental Studies, Melinda has pursued these interests in her career with the Countryside Movement, the RSPB, NFU and at Suffolk County Council.

**Annette Ellis** – Annette has a lifelong interest in wildlife & landscapes. After a ‘first career’ in teaching, coordinating, planning and resourcing the geography curriculum in primary schools, she now works in tourism coordinating the Mid Suffolk Tourist Information Centres. *Annette became a member of SLAF in October 2013.*

**Barry Hall** – Barry is a retired local government officer with experience of working on countryside and rights of way projects. Barry retains an interest in countryside access as a member of the RSPB, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and National Trust.

**Margaret Hancock** – Margaret is a Blue Badge Tourist Guide. A keen cyclist, Margaret is passionate about promoting sustainable tourism by encouraging walking, cycling and the use of public transport. Margaret is a volunteer for the Out and About charity, providing support for children and young people with disabilities.

**Jane Hatton** – A horse rider and background in Sales and Marketing, Jane set up her own company, The Organic Box, growing and supplying vegetables to both restaurants and the public. Jane is the Sudbury Town Centre Development Manager and a member of the Gainsborough Trail working group establishing a continuous walk around Sudbury. *Jane became a member of SLAF in October 2013.*

**Cllr Diana Kearsley** – With a keen interest in wildlife and preserving Suffolk, Diana has specific responsibilities for community issues and is also a member of the ‘Development Control’ committee for Mid Suffolk District Council. *Cllr Diana Kearsley became a member of SLAF in October 2013.*

**Ann Langley** – Ann is involved with the Pony Club, the Easton Harriers Hunt, and is a founder member of the Mid-Suffolk Bridleways Association which works to



maintain and open bridleways. Ann is also a Councillor on Ashfield cum Thorpe Parish Council. *Ann stepped down from SLAF at the end of her term in April 2014.*

**Gordon Merfield** – With a background in agriculture, since the 1980's Gordon has been active in participating and coaching field sports events as well as being interested in the wider countryside and walking in foreign countries.

**Alan Moore** – Alan is a retired Head of Regional Planning and Transport for the East of England Regional Assembly, and is now a volunteer with the Stroke Association and West Suffolk Headway. With a particular focus on access for disabled people, Alan is interested in the issue of local access and the need to ensure that it is properly and effectively provided for both urban and rural areas.

**Monica Pipe** – Monica farms just north of Ipswich and has many well-used footpaths on her land including the promoted Fynn Valley Walk.

**Richard Powell** – Richard has worked for 25 years in nature conservation. He is a member of the Ramblers Association, RSPB, National Trust and Friends of the Lake District. He believes that the health and wellbeing of the population is driven by access to the countryside. *Richard became a member of SLAF in October 2013, but stepped down in July 2014 due to other commitments.*

**Norman Southgate** – Rights of way officer for the Suffolk Landrover Owners Club, Norman keeps members aware of where they can legally go off-road. He is a keen sailor and member of the Copdock & Washbrook footpath maintenance working group. *Norman stepped down from SLAF at the end of his term in April 2014.*

**Councillor Jane Storey** – SCC Councillor for Thedwastre North, Jane's interests include walking, dog-walking, off-road driving and, being a farmer's daughter, a strong view that along with rights come responsibilities. Jane believes that we should preserve our rights of way, including byways and bridleways, but not at the expense of common sense. These are an important part of presenting Suffolk as the Greenest County, useful for getting from A to B, but also for getting people who do not normally exercise out and about at little or no expense.

**Mike Taylor** – With a Forestry Commission background, Mike brings experience of managing large tracts of land as a business whilst ensuring that conservation and public access are fully taken into account.

**John Wayman** – A former district council member farming in the Stour Valley, John now contributes to the wider rural picture.

**Roley Wilson** – Roley has a lifelong interest in nature and open air pursuits. During a 33-year police career one of his many postings involved being the Wildlife Liaison Officer for Suffolk. He is a member of the Ramblers and since retirement has spent an increasing amount of time in volunteer activities for that organisation. A keen bird watcher and member of the RSPB and Suffolk Wildlife Trust he has a passion for

ensuring that everyone has free and responsible access to the countryside. *Roley became a member of SLAF in October 2013.*

**Anthony Wright** – A long-term cyclist and walker, Anthony has worked with several local authorities on the production of cycling and walking publications and works part time with the sustainable transport charity Sustrans.

**Sources of further information**

- a) Suffolk Local Access Forum web pages:  
<http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/suffolk-local-access-forum/>
- b) The Suffolk Rights of Way Improvement Plan:  
<http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/home/rights-of-way-improvement-plan/>

Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on 15 September 2015 at 2.00 pm in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, Ipswich.

Present: Councillors Colin Noble (Chairman), Christopher Hudson (Vice Chairman), Lisa Chambers, James Finch, Tony Goldson, Matthew Hicks, Beccy Hopfensperger, Gordon Jones, Richard Smith MVO and Sarah Stamp

Also present: Councillors Sonia Barker, Peter Beer, Tony Brown, Stephen Burroughes, Terry Clements, James Crossley, Mary Evans, Julian Flood, Sandra Gage, Michael Gower, Derek Hackett, Leonard Jacklin, Inga Lockington, Sandy Martin, Guy McGregor, Bill Mountford, Alan Murray, Graham Newman, Penny Otton, Bert Poole, Reg Silvester and David Wood

Supporting officers present: Susan Cassedy (Democratic Services Officer).

## **25. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies of absence received.

## **26. Declarations of Interest and Dispensations**

There were no declarations of interest of dispensations received.

## **27. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **28. Public Questions**

There was one public question received.

### **Question from Adam Robertson to Councillor James Finch, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport:**

“Mark Bee stated at the Lowestoft Third Crossing Steering Group Meeting on the 12th June, "Communications will need to demonstrate that all options are being considered as part of the feasibility study and that engagement across all stakeholders and political parties is occurring". Why has there only been consultation with Waveney and Lowestoft Chamber of Commerce and not the population of Lowestoft, or opposition political parties?”

**Answer from Councillor James Finch, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport:**

“Lowestoft has the best opportunity it has ever had to secure the prize of a third crossing following the Government’s decision to invest significant funds for the development of a business case that can demonstrate the value for money of a new crossing. The county council as scheme promoter, alongside the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, understands absolutely that a prerequisite for the delivery of a new crossing, which is likely to be a very expensive project, will be the support for the project by the people who live and work in Lowestoft. The Department for Transport has imposed a challenging time table for the submission of an outline business case, which must be completed by the end of 2015.

There was extensive public consultation about a third crossing during study work in 2014. It was clear from the consultation that there was a clear desire for a third crossing and strong opinions about its location and this is understood. It is unlikely that there will be a re-run of a public consultation exercise during this short period of business case development. Wider public engagement is more likely at the next stage of scheme development when more detailed design work will take place. In the short term there will be stakeholder engagement, particularly with the business community because a key element of the business case will be to demonstrate how a third crossing will bring significant benefit to the Lowestoft economy. The County Council has asked the Lowestoft and Waveney Chamber of Commerce to lead the business engagement. It is intended that there will also be engagement with stakeholders representing wider community interests as the project develops.”

**Supplementary Question:**

Mr Robertson was not in attendance therefore there was no supplementary question.

**Comments by other councillors:** The Chairman, exercising his Chairman’s discretion, allowed comments by other Councillors. In response to Councillors’ comments the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport advised that there had been extensive consultation and that he would welcome all other consultation. He pointed out the tight time scale and confirmed that there would be further opportunities for consultation with the people of Lowestoft. He stressed that views should be expressed sooner rather than later.

**29. Standing Item – Update from the Scrutiny Chairman**

At Agenda Item 5, the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee and the Chairman of the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee provided the Cabinet with an update on recent scrutiny activity.

**Decision:** The Cabinet noted the Scrutiny Update.

**Reason for Decision:** The Cabinet recognised the importance of the Scrutiny function.

**Comments by other councillors:** The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills advised that there would be a briefing arranged for all Councillors on revenue and capital spending.

With regard to recommendation 3b about accessibility of RAISEonline, the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills advised that the comments would be taken on board to raise awareness.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills also advised that briefings on changes to the school performance assessment framework had taken place the previous year however very few Councillors had attended.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

### 30. Suffolk Local Access Forum Annual Report August 2014-July 2015

A report at Agenda Item 6 by the Director of Resource Management invited the Cabinet to receive the annual report of the Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF).

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport welcomed Bryan Collen, Chairman, SLAF to the meeting and invited him to present the report.

**Decision:** The Cabinet:

- i) accepted the 2014/15 annual report of the Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF): and
- ii) noted the report's recommendations and the action that the Council was taking to address these recommendations.

**Reason for Decision:** The Suffolk Local Access Forum was a statutory, independent body whose purpose was to advise on making improvements to public access for outdoor recreation and sustainable travel. It was required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to submit an annual report on rights of way and access matters to the Council. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs guidance stated: "We would expect the authority to respond positively to the forum's annual report and to say what actions they had taken on the advice and recommendations of the forum."

**Comments by other councillors:** The Cabinet Member for Finance provided assurance with regard to Sizewell C by advising that after Sizewell B was completed both the Landscape and Rights of Way were restored.

The Chairman of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership reminded Bryan Collen last year's invitation to attend one of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership meetings. In noting that SLAF currently had a working group looking at coastal erosion, he also suggested that Bryan Collen may also wish to talk to the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership officers on this issue as it may be of benefit to the SLAF Working Group.

In response to a Councillor raising concern about the Suffolk Rights of Way Improvement Plan and engagement with schools, Bryan Collen advised that engagement to encourage children to lead healthy lifestyles was a real problem

which needed to be addressed. The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport considered gridlock outside expanding schools to be an important point and that a solution involving children walking to school would be desirable.

With regard to the level of funding SLAF received the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport advised that it was a case of balancing finances with the Council's statutory responsibilities.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

In noting that Bryan Collen would be stepping down as Chairman of the SLAF and this was his last time he would be presenting the report, the Cabinet and other Councillors thanked him for his excellent Chairing and SLAF's achievements during his Chairmanship.

### 31. Annual Safeguarding Reports

A report at Agenda Item 7 by the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services invited the Cabinet to comment on and agree proposed priorities for Safeguarding.

**Decision:** The Cabinet noted the reports on how effective Suffolk County Council and partners were in safeguarding vulnerable children in Suffolk and accepted the recommended priorities in the LSCB annual report for the coming year.

**Reason for Decision:** Local authorities had overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area and with a number of statutory functions under the 1989 and 2004 Children Acts. This included specific duties in relation to children in need and children suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Under section 14a of the Children Act 2004 the LSCB chair must publish an annual report on the effectiveness of child safeguarding and on promoting the welfare of children in the local area. Statutory guidance required that this must be presented to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

**Comments by other councillors:** The Chairman announced that dates had now been published for Councillors' training on Child Sexual Exploitation and stressed how important it was for Councillors to attend. He advised that he had asked for additional dates to be made available to Councillors and that the Cabinet would be receiving a specific training session on this issue.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection advised that it was important that organisations understood when to contact the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in order to reduce unnecessary referrals. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services provided reassurance that this was being monitored.

In response to a Councillor's question regarding asylum seekers, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services advised that the Council took its position with

regard to receiving asylum seekers very seriously. He also advised that a paper had been considered at Suffolk's Health and Wellbeing Board's last meeting dealing with the specific issue of mental health in young people and assured the Councillors he would keep members informed. Officers advised that the Learning Improvement Group was scrutinising the data on CCG waiting times for children who were self-harming and had asked for a report from all three CCGs by the end of November.

Officers advised that the re-structuring of the CYP Directorate was now complete and had been implemented in April 2015. The Cabinet was advised that the number of redundancies had been very small and that out of the 1,000 members of staff affected by the restructure there had been 12 voluntary redundancies and 4 or 5 compulsory redundancies.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services advised he would provide written answers to a Councillor's questions regarding; i) the breakdown of referrals to CAMHs by geographical areas and ii) social worker recruitment by geographical areas in relation to staff moral and efficiency. In response to a Councillor's comment regarding the impact that domestic violence had on children's education the Cabinet Member for Children's Services agreed that it was often the case that children's education suffered due to what was happening at home.

In response to a Councillor's concerns regarding the attendance of all relevant agencies at child protection conferences officers provided reassurance that attendance was being monitored and agencies were being held to account. Officers also advised that a report was going to the LSCB in October on safeguarding disabled children.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

### 32. Annual Corporate Parenting Board Report

A report at Agenda Item 8 by the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services invited the Cabinet to endorse the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

**Decision:** The Cabinet:

- i) noted the progress made by the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) in raising the awareness of Members and senior officers in Suffolk County Council and partner agencies of their corporate parenting responsibilities;
- ii) endorsed the continuing role of the Board as champions for the voice of children in care and care leavers, acting 'as if they are our child';
- iii) noted the performance and achievements of the CPB in meeting its 2014/15 priorities to promote and improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers; and

- iv) in considering what actions would assist the Council in fulfilling its corporate parenting responsibilities agreed the proposed priorities for the CPB for 2015/16.

**Reason for Decision:** In recognition of the continuing importance of services specifically provided for Looked After Children and the effectiveness of agencies in discharging their Corporate Parenting responsibilities the Cabinet noted that this report has been provided to them for information on the work of the Corporate Parenting Board over the last year (2014-15).

The Cabinet acknowledged that this would assist it in fulfilling its duty to ensure that the interests of looked after children and care leavers were appropriately reflected in all Council policies and in the priorities of the Children's Trust commissioning group, and Local Safeguarding Children and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

The report provided an overview of the work of the CPB and highlighted the achievements and challenges the Board had identified, setting out the proposed actions for the coming year.

**Comments by other councillors:** The Cabinet Member for Communities stated that the Council should aspire to the very best education for all it's looked after children and therefore was really pleased to hear about the virtual governing body and commended the Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Board for moving that forward. She asked if elected members sat on the board and how educational attainment of looked after children could be reported back more regularly to Councillors. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services advised that there were members from the Corporate Parenting Board sitting on the Virtual Governing Body and advised that he would take steps to ensure that the reports from the Virtual Governing Body were circulated more widely. He advised that the Head of the Governing Body would be held to account in the same way as for a normal school's governing body.

The Member with responsibility for Looked After Children reinforced the message about the corporate responsibilities of Councillors and advised that, as a member of the Virtual Governing Body would also ensure information would be widely circulated.

A Councillor in noting that young people required quality accommodation also pointed out the importance of those young people also receiving appropriate support.

A Councillor wished to know what support was available for those young people leaving care who were in employment and also have access to benefits. Officers advised that the Council contracted its leaving care services from an organisation called 'Catch 22' which provided a very comprehensive support package and took on young people from 16 years old and worked with them to the age of 21 or beyond that if in higher education. The Council also had the Financial Inclusion Advise Team which offered considerable advice around receiving benefits and trained staff across a wide range of agencies on providing advice about accessing benefits and worked closely with the Citizens' Advice Bureau.



Officers clarified that the definition of 'missing' was when the whereabouts of a young person in care was not known. The Council would report this to the police as a 'missing' incident and the police would go out and look for that young person. The Police together with the Council would use a risk indicator if the young person was believed to be at risk. An 'absence' was for a much shorter duration such as when a young person did not return from their known location at the time agreed by foster carers or residential unit.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

*The meeting was adjourned at 3.49 pm.*

*The meeting was reconvened at 4.02 pm*

### 33. Rural Transport Tenders

A report at Agenda Item 9 by the Director of Resource Management invited the Cabinet to consider a new model of rural transport across Suffolk. The new model aims to bring together the existing rural transport services which are currently funded by the Council and encourage community transport, bus and taxi companies to work together to improve services at lower cost.

**Decision:** The Cabinet:

- i) agreed to a new model for the coordination and funding of rural transport across Suffolk; and
- ii) delegated authority to the Director of Resource Management, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Roads and Transport to undertake a procurement and subsequent contract award for the provision of rural transport services across Suffolk.

**Reason for Decision:** The Cabinet considered that helping move people around Suffolk was a really important role for the Council. As well as meeting statutory duties (home to school transport and concessionary fares) the Council sought to help overcome issues of rural isolation.

As part of its overall travel budget the Council currently spent £1.4M per year with Community Transport operators. The funding was allocated through a series of grants, contracts, as well as the loan of vehicles.

The Accessibility Policy Development Panel examined rural transport, reporting to Cabinet in July 2014. It was clear from the Panel's findings that whilst current services were valued, the service offered varies across the County with room for improvement. Cabinet acknowledged that customers were confused and found 'Community Transport' difficult to understand and to identify which services to use. There was a clear requirement to simplify and provide more clarity to the transport solutions offered that supported or offer alternatives to conventional bus or train services.

In addition, there were further pressures for reviewing the arrangements for rural transport:

- a) The current level of funding was not sustainable – the Council needed to find ways of meeting demand at a lower cost.
- b) In some areas there weren't currently enough suppliers of home to school transport, particularly for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). This resulted in the Council paying a premium rate to taxi operators.
- c) The current Suffolk Links contracts would be ending in April 2016.

The combination of these factors meant it was timely to examine the way in which Rural Transport was currently organised in Suffolk, and to explore whether there were any better alternatives that would help stimulate a more sustainable transport network.

Conversations commenced with the community transport sector in December 2014 and two formal market engagement events had been held for interested operators in June and July of this year. These events were structured to give the attendees a chance to help shape a proposal. A series of discussions had been held with prospective suppliers, as well as wider stakeholder groups.

Through these events a new model for the future provision of services had been developed. At its heart was the principle of improved coordination of community and commercial transport. It was envisaged that this will provide a more proficient service to the public, potentially improve customer revenue streams, and consequently reduce the reliance on Council funding in the future.

The new model would be implemented through the award of seven contracts to single suppliers or Consortium. The public procurement regulations required the contracts to be awarded through a competitive procurement process.

**Comments by other councillors:** The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, who was in support of the proposals, advised that in some areas there was not enough suppliers of home to school transport, particularly for those children with educational needs and this issue needed to be addressed and make the most efficient use of money.

The Cabinet Member for Health described the paper as timely and considered that the proposals would meet the needs of patients and their relatives.

The Cabinet Member for Finance welcomed the paper and advised that there was a very strong community transport organisation in his division that had been nervous about the changes. He advised that he had put the organisation in touch with the Council's Officers and discussion had taken place.

The Cabinet Member for Finance considered that the purpose of these changes would provide a better service at a lower cost and that the Council needed to consider all options on how it could operate more efficiently. In response the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport acknowledge that change was always challenging and advised that the Council had engaged with the Community Transport Group on more than one occasion to identify those concerns.

A Councillor who had been a member of the Accessibility Policy Development Panel explained how complex the issue of rural transport was and that the Panel had heard many moving stories about the difficulties people had faced.

The Councillor hoped that no village would feel as isolated as they did currently.

A Councillor stated that she was disappointed by the conclusions of the Accessibility Policy Development Panel and considered that the recommendations were about cutting funding by 50% rather than providing truly reliable transport. The Councillor wished to know what consultation had taken place with service users and what support was being given to the current providers. The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport advised that it was not easy to consult on a large scale and that consultation had taken place via the forums and that the people who provided the service often knew about their customers' requirements.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

#### **34. Variation to Contracts with Realise Futures Community Interest Company(CIC)**

A report at Agenda Item 10 by the Corporate Director for Adult and Community Services invited the Cabinet to approve a contract extension for the block funding of therapeutic placements and the proposal to issue an "Evergreen" contract for the support of the "Protected 30" Whitehouse Employees divested with Realise Futures CIC.

**Decision:** The Cabinet approved:

- i) a contract extension for block funding of therapeutic placements with Realise Futures until 31 March 2016; and
- ii) a contract with Realise Futures, continuing the supported employment of 20 disabled employees at Whitehouse Enterprises, transferred from Suffolk County Council to Realise Futures CIC (1 November 2012).

**Reason for Decision:** Council's existing contract with Realise Futures, issued 1 November 2012, was for a 3 year period.

The Cabinet noted that the proposed direction for this service was that over time customers would move from having services contracted by the Council to having increased control over their support and would make individual arrangements with providers for support. This may well involve them continuing to receive support from Realise Futures.

Progress towards a position where customers arranged their own support had been slower than anticipated and the Cabinet recognised the need to ensure that current customers had stability

Cabinet acknowledged that its approval was required to extend the current agreement beyond 31 October 2015. To accommodate any unforeseen circumstances flexibility would be built into the new agreement to enable an extension if required.

In respect of the proposed contract for the 20 disabled employees at Whitehouse Enterprises, the Cabinet noted that the current contract with Realise Futures expired on 31 October 2015. Due to the particular circumstances of these employees, the Cabinet noted that it was agreed in the original contract, that the employment of these individuals was protected and the Cabinet considered this was still the best course of action for this client group.

**Comments by other councillors:** Cabinet Members expressed support for the report. There were no comments received from other Councillors.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

### 35. 2015/16 Budget Monitoring for Revenue and Capital Spending

A report at Agenda Item 11 by the Director of Resource Management invited the Cabinet to consider the Council's overall financial position against the approved budget.

**Decision:** The Cabinet:

- i) agreed that the budget was being appropriately managed by Officers to remain within the resource limit agreed by the Council; and
- ii) noted the significant transfers (virements) in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations.

**Reason for Decision:** The Cabinet noted that this paper presented a forecast for the 2015/16 revenue and capital budgets based on expenditure trends and information available at the end of July 2015.

**Comments by other councillors:**, In the absence of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills advised that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services monitored the figures for out of county institutional placements via the Children's Services Accountability Board and that she was sure he would be happy to report back to all councillors on the statistics and the work he was currently doing to reduce the number of out of county placements. A Councillor requested that this data be included in the next budget monitoring report.

In response to a Councillor's question regarding poor performance of contractors, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport advised that all contractors had key performance indicators and if not met, penalties would be imposed on them. He advised that information on penalties so far imposed had been included in a recent Scrutiny Committee report.

With regard to the Capital Programme for Resource Management a Councillor raised concern about transport projects continually being delayed and carried over year after year whilst there being a substantial underspend. The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport confirmed that that this was the biggest variance on the Capital Programme and that he was meeting with officers at the end of the week to discuss this issue and that he would inform the Councillor of

the outcome. He advised that there had been some projects which had been delayed for very good reasons. He also advised that £30m would be spent on highway maintenance in 2015/16

In response to concern expressed over the term 'offset by staff vacancies' used in the report, the Cabinet Member for Finance advised that having staff vacancies for a reasonable length was legitimate and could help to resolve budgetary pressures. Officers confirmed that this was a plausible way of managing budgets.

The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that reserves were coming down and not going up and that this was likely to be a trend which would continue. He advised that in the past the Council had tried to build up its reserves for a 'rainy day'. He acknowledged the future financial pressure on both Children and Young People's Services and Adult and Community Services and that difficult decisions lay ahead.

With regard to risk in Adult and Community Services, Officers referred to paragraph 15 of the report which provided information on the Better Care fund (BCF) arrangements and advised that £1.5m was expected to be transferred from the CCG to ACS in 2015/16 resulting in a budget shortfall in the current year of £2.6m and that in later paragraphs it explained how this could be covered in the coming year. As the BCF was a one year settlement, Officers explained that it was not clear what would happen going forward, however, it was hoped that Health would achieve further savings which could also be transferred across to the Council and therefore the risk was covered to an extent.

Officers explained that contingency reserves had gone up due to an extra one off Council Tax surplus coming in late in the budget cycle.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

### **36. Developing Suffolk's Devolution Proposal**

A report at Agenda Item 12 by the Chief Executive invited the Cabinet to agree the draft Suffolk devolution proposal developed by partners and to delegate to the Leader of the Council responsibility to agree the final proposal for consideration by Suffolk Public Sector Leaders on 18 September 2015.

This proposal would form the basis for negotiation with Government. Following this negotiation, any proposed devolved arrangements would be subject to consideration by Full Council and decision by Cabinet.

**Decision:** The Cabinet agreed:

- i) Suffolk's ambition and approach to devolution; and
- ii) that the Expression of Interest as set out at Appendix A of the report be discussed at County Council.

**Reason for Decision:** Suffolk leaders were keen to proactively influence and negotiate with Government as early as possible in order to secure the best possible outcomes for Suffolk residents. Therefore, it was important that to enter negotiations with Government as soon as possible, the ambition and approach had been democratically agreed and endorsed.

**Comments by other councillors:** The Cabinet Member for Health welcomed the opportunity for devolved responsibility for health which would help to continue improving the health and wellbeing of all Suffolk residents. The Leader advised that the CCGs were very much committed to the proposals. The Cabinet Member for Adult Care confirmed that the strength of the Suffolk bid was the inclusion of Health and that the CCGs were very positive about being involved. The Leader explained that submitting the bid at this time would provide a real opportunity to develop something which fitted Suffolk rather than the standard model which would eventually arrive if it did not submit at this early stage.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection supported the approach and stated that he would be pleased to see the devolution of powers and decisions with better accountability and more transparency.

The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that he had sat on the Councillors' Working Group which was made up of Councillors from all Suffolk's local authorities and was set up in July 2015 to discuss devolution in order to be able to advise the Suffolk Leaders and the Suffolk Chief Executives. The Leader added that everyone had come together to meet the 4 September 2015 submission deadline as it was recognised how significant this issue was.

The Cabinet Member for Ipswich recognised that the possible savings from the proposals were enormous and considered that the people of Suffolk would never forgive the Council if it did not make the most of this opportunity. The Leader added that all the organisations involved brought different things to the table and a rapport had been established between them and this approach would be carried forward into the discussions with Norfolk.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills considered that the document clearly supported the ambition to raise educational standards in Suffolk and would build on the skills work already under way aligning very neatly with the Raising the Bar strategies. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills considered it a great opportunity to ensure partnerships were strengthened to get a better deal for the education and skills agenda.

In response to a Councillor's concerns about the document not containing great detail of what was on offer, the Leader advised that the document was the Expression of Interest which had been submitted on 4 September and that a bigger document sat behind it that was currently being worked through which contained greater detail. This more detailed document would continue to be informed by the discussions taking place across Suffolk including the workshops. The Government had stated that it had liked the Expression of Interest but wanted to see something further around economic growth and that was why discussions would now be taking place with Norfolk.

In response to Councillors' questions the Leader:

- i) confirmed that he was of the opinion that the email, containing the note of a meeting held on 9 September outlining the Government requirements for devolution in Suffolk, appeared to have been sent to everyone who should have seen it. However, anyone could share anything with anybody they wished as it was about everyone coming together. There was no advantage to any one group seeing more than anyone else.
- ii) explained that due to a Conservative Party Away Day he had been unable to attend the meeting on 9 September. He confirmed that he had cross referenced the note sent out with extensive notes from Suffolk's Chief Executive and three other leaders from across Norfolk and Suffolk that sat on the LEP Board. He had then confirmed with them that it was a fair and true reflection of the discussion and it was agreed by all that it was.
- iii) advised that the Public Sector Leaders Board, which included David Ellsmere, Leader of Ipswich Borough Council, had agreed that it should carry out the negotiation after which it should go through the democratic processes to inform other Councillors. The Leader confirmed that the note had not been circulated to all Conservative Councillors.
- iv) confirmed that the combined authority discussion was very much around economic growth and that Suffolk and Norfolk both had their own specific identities. However the Board had accepted the Government's argument that a wider area around economic development would have distinct advantages and agreed to look at a combined authority around economic growth.
- v) explained that he preferred Suffolk's current governance arrangements. If however the Government decided that it wished to see a directly elected mayor to occur then an argument would be made around how strong or weak that mayoral system was. Suffolk had a strongly functioning Public Sector's Leader Board which was capable of taking those joint decisions that devolution would require.
- vi) confirmed that the Government had made it perfectly clear it was not interested in receiving bids from individual authorities. The Government had stated that Suffolk had a track record of being able to do things via partnership working.
- vii) advised that a 'Point 26' would be inserted in the Expression of Interest document following the clear message contained in the note regarding a combined authority for economic growth.
- viii) confirmed that he along with all of the other district and borough leaders including all those in Norfolk and Suffolk would be attending the meeting on 22 September. He added that this meeting was one of many that would start the following day in Westminster Hall when Norfolk and Suffolk Leaders will gather with Greg Clark MP to talk about the combined authority around economic growth.
- ix) confirmed that he not only accepted that the bid needed to be submitted in time for the Government's Autumn Statement but absolutely welcome

it as there were early adopter advantages. Suffolk could design something that worked for Suffolk and with regard to economic growth Suffolk and Norfolk could design something that suited both authorities.

- x) confirmed he would let all Councillors know if there was any change in the timetable.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

### **37. Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

*The meeting closed at 6.27 pm.*

Chairman