

Suffolk County Council meeting Thursday 11 December 2025, vote taken on Motion 2.

Motion – Proposed by Councillor Ruth Leach and seconded by Councillor Andrew Stringer.

Motion Text: 'This Council notes:

1. That all Suffolk's rivers — including the Stour, Orwell, Gipping, Deben, Alde, Blyth and Waveney — are central to the county's ecological health, cultural heritage, local economy and community wellbeing.
2. That rivers across the UK face growing pressures from pollution, habitat degradation, over-abstraction and the impacts of climate change.
3. That there is an emerging international and national movement recognising the "Rights of Rivers" as a constructive framework for improving the long-term health and resilience of waterways.

This Council believes:

That adopting a Rights-of-Rivers approach can strengthen efforts to protect Suffolk's freshwater ecosystems and support the Council's wider environmental, climate and biodiversity ambitions.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Acknowledge in principle the intrinsic rights of rivers within Suffolk, informed by the principles of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers, including:
 - The right to flow, naturally and seasonally;
 - The right to perform essential ecosystem functions;
 - The right to be free from pollution and contamination;
 - The right to interact sustainably with aquifers and freshwater sources;
 - The right to native biodiversity, ecological integrity, and restoration;
 - The right to regeneration from environmental harm.
2. Work collaboratively with local communities, river trusts, environmental organisations, landowners, district and parish councils, and statutory bodies to explore practical ways of recognising and strengthening river rights and river health across Suffolk.
3. Embed river-health considerations into relevant Council strategies and policies, including those relating to planning, water management, highways, flood risk, biodiversity and climate adaptation.
4. Advocate to national and regional bodies, including the Environment Agency and water companies, for stronger protections for Suffolk's rivers and for greater transparency around water quality and river health.

5. Support local monitoring and restoration initiatives, including citizen science programmes, riparian habitat projects and nature-based solutions.
6. Facilitate the development of a “Declaration on the Rights of Rivers in Suffolk”, led by relevant stakeholders, and bring a draft declaration to Council for consideration within two years.’

Total results	
For	18
Against	27
Abstain	7

Conservative Group

Councillor's Name	For	Against	Abstain
Edward Back		Against	
Peter Beer			
Bobby Bennett		Against	
Stuart Bird		Against	
Elaine Bryce		Against	
Stephen Burroughes		Against	
Nadia Cenci		Against	
Jenny Ceresa			
Chris Chambers		Against	
Judy Cloke			
Andy Drummond		Against	
James Finch			Abstain
Jessica Fleming			Abstain
Mick Fraser			Abstain
David Goldsmith			
Georgia Hall			
Liz Harsant	For		
Ryan Harvey			
T-J Haworth-Culf			
Matthew Hicks			
Rachel Hood		Against	
Beccy Hopfensperger		Against	
Michael Ladd			Abstain
Stuart Lawson			
Henry Lloyd			
Joe Mason		Against	
Debbie McCallum		Against	
Patti Mulcahy			
Alexander Nicoll			Abstain
Colin Noble		Against	
Kay Oakes			
James Reeder		Against	
Andrew Reid		Against	
Debbie Richards		Against	
David Roach		Against	

Keith Robinson		Against	
Richard Rout		Against	
Richard Smith MVO		Against	
Karen Soons			
Joanna Spicer			
Lance Stanbury		Against	
Jamie Starling			
Paul West		Against	
Steve Wiles		Against	
Nathan Wilson	For		

Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent Group

Councillor's Name	For	Against	Abstain
Seamus Bennett	For		
Jessie Carter	For		
Annette Dunning	For		
Simon Harley	For		
Richard Kemp			
Ruth Leach	For		
Ash Lever			
Robert Lindsay	For		
Inga Lockington	For		
Victor Lukaniuk	For		
Andy Mellen	For		
Penny Otton			
Keith Scarff	For		
Andrew Stringer	For		
Caroline Topping	For		
Keith Welham	For		

Labour Group

Councillor's Name	For	Against	Abstain
Rob Bridgeman			Abstain
Peter Byatt	For		
Adele Cook			Abstain
Elizabeth Farrow			
Sandy Martin	For		
Lucy Smith			

Reform UK Councillors

Councillor's Name	For	Against	Abstain
Philip Faircloth-Mutton		Against	
Christopher Hudson		Against	
Martin Robinson		Against	
Heike Sowa			

Ungrouped Independent Councillors

Councillor's Name	For	Against	Abstain
Sam Murray			
David Nettleton	For		
Peter Thompson		Against	