

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	Agenda
Meeting Date:	Thursday 22 October 2026 2:00pm - 4:00pm
Author/Contact:	Andrew Woodin
Venue:	Endeavour House

		Paper Number
1.	14:00 Welcome, apologies and housekeeping	
2.	14.05 Minutes of previous meeting DRAFT	LAF 26/18
3.	14.15 Declaration of interest	
4.	14.20 King Charles III England Coast Path	CD LAF 26/19
5.	14.30 NSIPs approved	AR LAF 26/20
6.	14.40 NSIPs in consultation	SDB LAF 26/21
7.	14.50 Large developments including Saxmundham	SDB Verbal update
8.	15.00 Network Rail and Ipswich Waterfront	SK LAF 26/22
9.	15.10 SLAF draft annual report 2026	AW Verbal update
10.	15.20 New NPPF	AW LAF 26/23
11.	15.30 Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution	AW LAF 26/24
12.	15.45 Public Question Time	
13.	15.50 Any other business	
14.	15.55 Dates & venues of future meetings	

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	The King Charles III England Coast Path
Paper:	LAF 26/19
Author/Contact:	Claire Dickson
Meeting:	Thursday 22 October 2026 2:00pm - 4:00pm
Venue:	Endeavour House

1. Progress on Establishing The King Charles III England Coast Path (KCIIIIECP)

The latest information from Natural England (NE) on its progress for the KCIIIIECP in Suffolk is shown on their website. The progress report update dates are shown in the links.

Stretch name	Progress
Harwich to Shotley Gate	OPEN for use from 29 th July 2026
Shotley Gate to Felixstowe Ferry	OPEN for use from 16 th October 2024
Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey	OPEN for use from 24 th September 2025
Bawdsey to Aldeburgh	OPEN for use from 30 th June 2026
Aldeburgh to Hopton-on-Sea	Five out of six reports are OPEN for use from 12 th December 2024 and 30 th June 2026 One out of six reports at Stage 5: Approved. (Not yet available for public use – work to establish the route is currently taking place). Note open in part: from Church Road, Kessingland to Pakefield from 30 th June 2026

The remaining stages to establish Coastal Access in Suffolk are as follows:

Stage 4: Determine

Once the period to comment on the proposals has ended, the Secretary of State will decide whether to approve the proposals in Natural England's report. When making a decision, any representations or objections that have been submitted will be considered along with the recommendations from the Planning Inspectorate.

Stage 5: Open

The Secretary of State approves the route of the England Coast Path on this stretch, or a report within the stretch.

Preparations are then made on the ground, and the necessary legal paperwork is completed. Once complete, the new public rights of access will come into force on the stretch.

Note: Whilst individual reports for sections within a stretch can be approved, in Suffolk stretches will not normally be launched until all the Coastal Access Reports comprising the stretch have been approved.

Further information on the KCIIIECP can be found [here](#).

2. The Stretches in More Detail

Natural England has provided this update on the national situation:

Just over 82% of the whole route is now open. Nationally 75 miles have opened since the previous LAF meeting, this includes a stretch within Suffolk.

Status of proposals	Number of miles
Total mileage submitted to government	2690
- complete and open for public use	2219
- approved by government and work to establish the route taking place, or awaited	413
- awaiting government decision	58

The latest information from Natural England on its progress for the King Charles III England Coast Path in Suffolk is shown on their website. The progress report update dates are shown in the links at the start of the report and more detail from Natural England is shown in the table below.

The Five Suffolk Stretches

Harwich to Shotley Gate – Giles Merritt. Last updated 06.10.2026

- Stage 5 (Open)
- Report 1 and 4. Secretary of State announced their approval of this stretch on 31 August 2021
- Report 2 and 3. Secretary of State announced their approval of this stretch on 18 September 2025.
- Report 5 and 6 opened to the public on 29th July 2026

Shotley Gate to Felixstowe Ferry – Giles Merritt. Last updated 06.10.2026

- Open for use.

Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey – Giles Merritt. Last updated 06.10.2026

- Open for use.

Bawdsey to Aldeburgh – Giles Merritt. Last updated 06.10.2026

- Open for use.

Aldeburgh to Hopton-on-Sea – Giles Merritt. Last updated 06.10.2026

- Stage 5 (Open)
- Reports 1, 2, 3 and 6 opened to the public on 12 December 2024.
- Report 4 - Secretary of State announced their approval of this stretch on 18 September 2025. Open in part: from Church Road, Kessingland to Pakefield. Work to establish the remainder of the route is now taking place, for opening in Autumn 2026
- Report 5 opened to the public on 30 June 2026

3. Suffolk Progress

Following the Secretary of State announcement regarding the approval of Bawdsey to Aldeburgh stretch in early May 2025, Harwich to Shotley Gate and remaining two sections of Aldeburgh to Hopton in September 2025. The project officer predominantly focused on the establishment works for these final approved stretches over the last 18 months due to the complexities of the vast amount of new access. With works now completed on Shotley Gate to Felixstowe Ferry, Aldeburgh to Hopton (stretches 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6), Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey, Bawdsey to Aldeburgh and Harwich to Shotley Gate (stretches 5 and 6) with all these stretches now open to the public. All works are funded by Natural England by applying for grants from them. The breadth of the establishment works is broad, ranging from ecology and tree safety surveys, revetment and surfacing works, design and construction of structures such as boardwalks, bridges, and steps, installation of mitigation fencing, new interpretation boards, bespoke heritage signs in conservation areas as well as the more familiar installation of new signposts and waymark posts.

The county council has developed new technical specifications and a GIS method for recording works including the production of bespoke maps and scheme details for the works packs needed for the quotation process, in line with the requirements of the Natural England grant scheme. Understanding and clarifying the many legal and technical aspects of the National Trail works and grant process with Natural England has been a key piece of work during the initial period.

Discussions continue between SCC Public Health, National Highways, Natural England and the Development & Improvement Manager on access by the King Charles III England Coast Path over the Orwell Bridge. National Highways agreed to replacement steps, and these have been installed, but the County Council continue to seek agreement to a resting point on the embankment and information signs. In late February 2025, National Highways confirmed that they would not want a resting point placed adjacent to the steps. Further discussions are ongoing with National Highways

over future improvements to the embankments and we await potential designs for access and recreation features.

The Green Access Team launched the alternative route through Ipswich Waterfront in March 2026. The route is promoted with gateway signage at either side of the Orwell Bridge. This project has funded by National Landscapes DEFRA Access Award. The project has included working with a variety of partners including Ipswich Borough Council, Greenways, All About Ipswich, National Highways, National Landscapes, Suffolk Food Hall and St Joseph's College, Ipswich. National Highways and the county council's public health team are pleased to see this project completed, which both gives an alternative to walking the bridge and promotes Ipswich.

Focus is on the remaining approved section covering Southwold to Pakefield, this stretch received approval just over 12 months ago. Scoping works have been completed with full Habitat Regulation Assessments carried out and mitigation works identified. The team have liaised closely with several of the land managers for planned works. With approvals gained for remaining stretches. Several joint site visits have been undertaken with Natural England and relevant landowners over the last year to resolve matters and confirmation of detailed works has now been secured. Work tenders have been completed for physical works for part of this section. Establishment grants have recently been awarded for planned works by Natural England, with physical works completed on one section of the optional alternative route.

The county council are awaiting resolution by Natural England for a couple of issues on this section prior to remaining grants being submitted for approval. We anticipate the matters being resolved in the coming months.

The team have continued to liaise closely with Natural England over work requirements and completed several joint meetings with relevant landowners on this remaining stretch over the last few months.

Discussions continue with Natural England on opening dates of the remaining approved stretch. It is anticipated that this will be open partially within the next few months.

The team continue to work closely with the RAMS Manager (Suffolk Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy) and Natural England to review all mitigation information signs. This is a positive area of work that will unify information signs on the trail and wider RAMS areas. Mitigation signage has been installed in line with RAMS Manager agreement on the three open stretches. This is continuing for the remaining approved stretches with detailed designs already agreed. The RAMS team also assisted Natural England and the Rights of Way and Access Team in a series of guided walks around the Butley estuary for local residents. This was to cover the alternative routes during the winter and explain the importance of this.

Natural England agreed funding for the Project Officer until 30th June 2026. To cover delivery of the remaining main stretches. As works now only remain on the Southwold to Kessingland stretch this is being managed by current team members with Natural England agreement.

The Operations Team have established fortnightly meetings with Natural England representatives. We have carried out a thirty-one positive site visits with Natural England on all stretches over the last year. This has enabled us to discuss delivery of works and to meet with third parties on interpretation and works requirements. We have agreed that this will continue with remaining stretch until establishment works are completed.

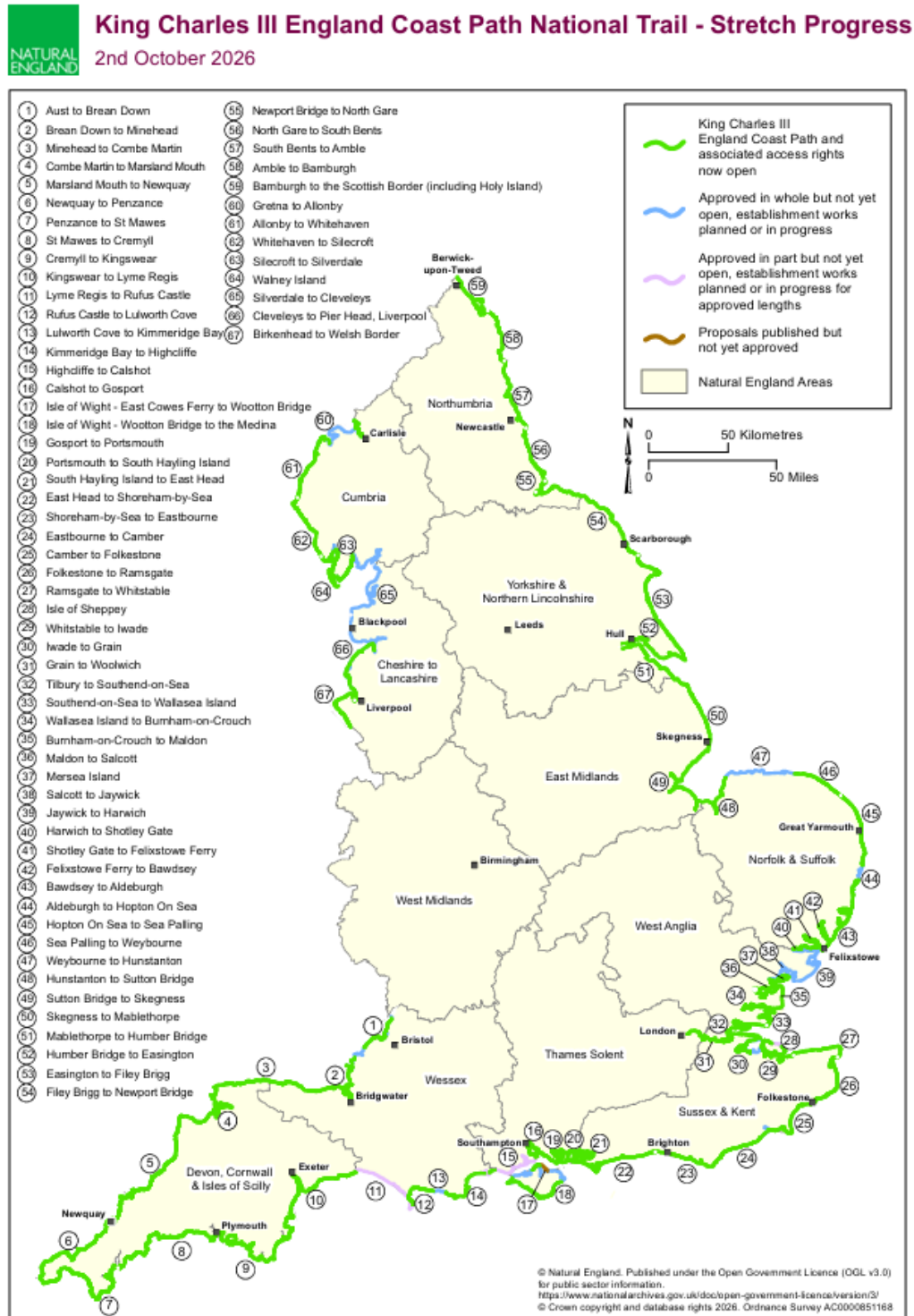
4. Future Management of the England Coast Path in the East of England

The county council will review the most effective way to promote the King Charles III England Coast Path in Suffolk once the remaining stretches have been open to the public.

The amount of national trail maintenance grant access authorities and trail partnerships receive from Natural England is worked out using a funding formula. As reported at January 2025 meeting the formula is being reviewed, and this process is ongoing, following the establishment of a review working group. The review has not affected 26/27 grant offer.

The new Green Access Manager commenced in post in August 2026; part of their role is working alongside the Operations Management Team in establishing a National Trail Partnership for the route and launch of the route in Suffolk. Meetings have already commenced with Natural England and research undertaken on existing Trail Partnerships. This will be developed further over the coming months.

5. England Coast Path – Progress Maps



The stretch between Shotley Gate and Felixstowe Ferry opened on 16th October 2024.

The stretch between Aldeburgh to Hopton (part) opened on 12th December 2024 and 30th June 2026.

The stretch between Felixstowe Ferry and Bawdsey opened on 24th September 2025

The stretch between Bawdsey to Aldeburgh opened on 30th June 2026.

The stretch between Harwich to Shotley Gate opened on 29th July 2026 (sections in Suffolk only)



END
CLD/SCC OCTOBER 2026

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	NSIPS Approved (Sizewell C, SPR East Anglia, Bramford to Twinstead)
Paper:	LAF 26/20
Author/Contact:	Annette Robinson
Meeting:	Thursday 22 October 2026 2:00pm - 4:00pm
Venue:	Endeavour House

Sizewell C

On all the SZC schemes affecting existing or new roads and PRow, the Highway NSIP team, liaising closely with SZC and the contractors, carries out daily monitoring of works to ensure compliance with approved designs and the DCO plans. This includes negotiating changes and pursuing matters relating to the design and construction delivery.

Current activities affecting PRow & Access

Sizewell Link Road (SLR) and Two Village Bypass (TVB)

The principal contractor for these two road schemes, Galliford Try, has been replaced by Kier and Breheny respectively and there have been short delays whilst the new contractors set up.

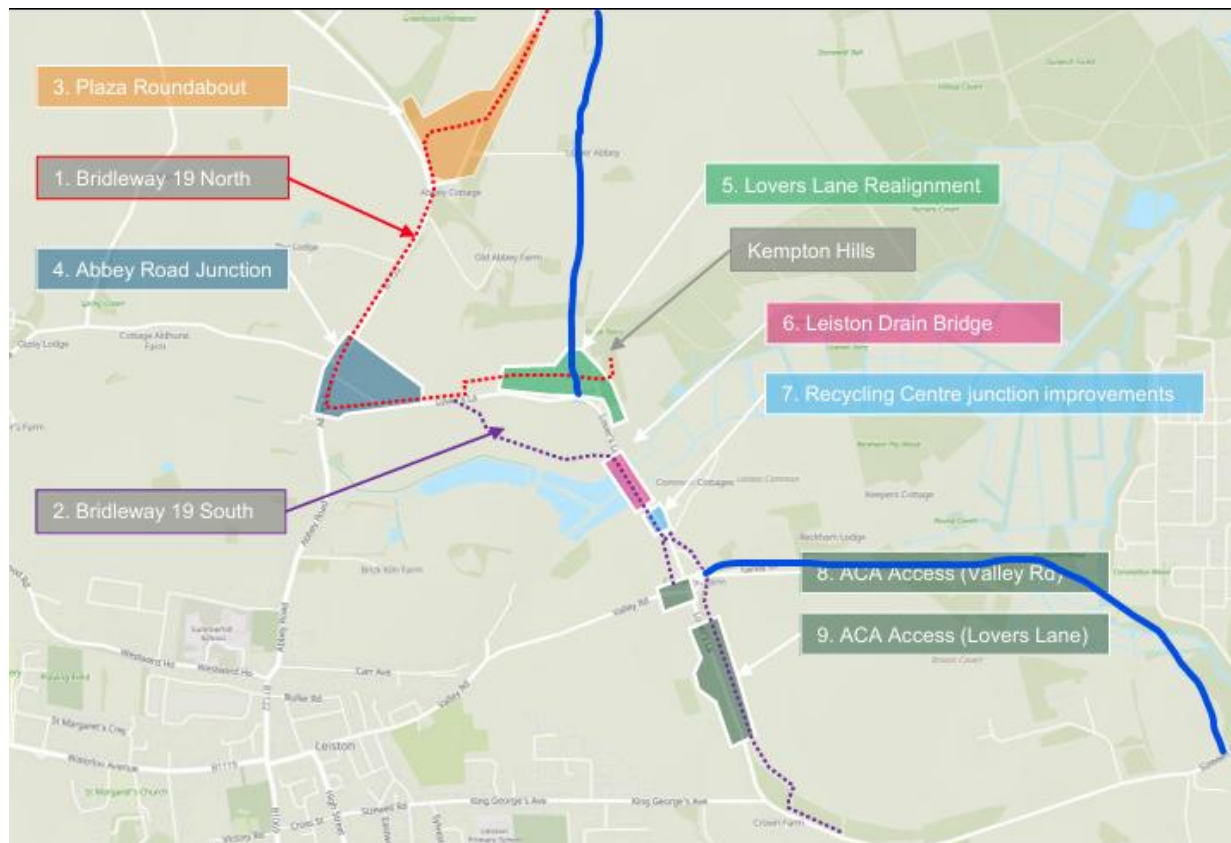
On both bypass schemes, SCC has ensured that there are phased temporary closures of the PRow with alternative routes being provided so that local communities remain linked, and circular walks possible. SCC has ensured that local communities are consulted. PRow that remain open have crossing points that are managed and manned by traffic marshals. The alternative routes are signed on site, maintained by SZC and are shown on the SZC tracker.

SZC non material change application

Remains under consideration by the Secretary of State but following the SCC response regarding PRow, further revisions are to be made to the Rights of Way & Access Plans to correct errors and to better reflect the detailed designs for the roads and PRow.

Main site works

It was expected that by this stage in the construction, Bridleway 19 from Lovers Lane to the Eastbridge Road (blue line below) would have been closed and the public directed to the new inland alternative bridleway as shown by the red and purple dots on the map below. However, this inland bridleway has not yet been completed and so bridleway 19 remains open, albeit with a series of temporary diversions and construction crossing points.



The access road and a new rail line to the main construction area cross the bridleway at the south end; the bridleway is fenced (as below) and the crossing points managed by traffic marshals following an agreed methodology.



A further 300m section is to be temporarily closed to with an alternative route constructed outside of the security fence and noise reduction fencing on the western edge of the construction area. SCC is currently reviewing this application.

On the coast

Marine Bulk Import Facility (MBIF) has been completed over the coast footpath. A second beach landing facility is proposed which will cross over the footpath, and SCC await details.



Coast Footpath has been diverted seaward at the south end to accommodate the installation of rock armour at the base of the sheet piling sea defence. SCC negotiated the restoration of the footpath back to its original position to future proof against erosion and storm events. An image of the finished scheme is below



East Anglia Two Offshore Windfarm

The cable corridor and haul road from the landfall site at Thorpeness to Friston is largely complete and there is a PRow Management Plan in place to ensure safe crossing points and alternative routes where closure is necessary. SCC inspect, approve and monitor these points and work with the contractor to negotiate better control measures or alternative routes. Work has started at the landfall site, and directional drilling is due to start in Aldringham which will avoid closures on several PRow.

Substation site - the landscaping at the Friston substation site has started and this will improve the setting of the new footpath.



END

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	NSIPS in consultation
Paper:	26/21
Author/Contact:	Samantha Bye
Meeting:	Thursday 22 October 2026 2:00pm - 4:00pm
Venue:	Endeavour House

Details of all NSIPs affecting Suffolk can be found on Suffolk County Council's website here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/major-infrastructure-projects-including-nsips/nsips-in-suffolk>

In response to the number of NSIPs in Suffolk SCC produced a Supplementary Guidance Document which can be seen here: [green-access-prow-guidance.pdf](#)

1. **Sea Link**

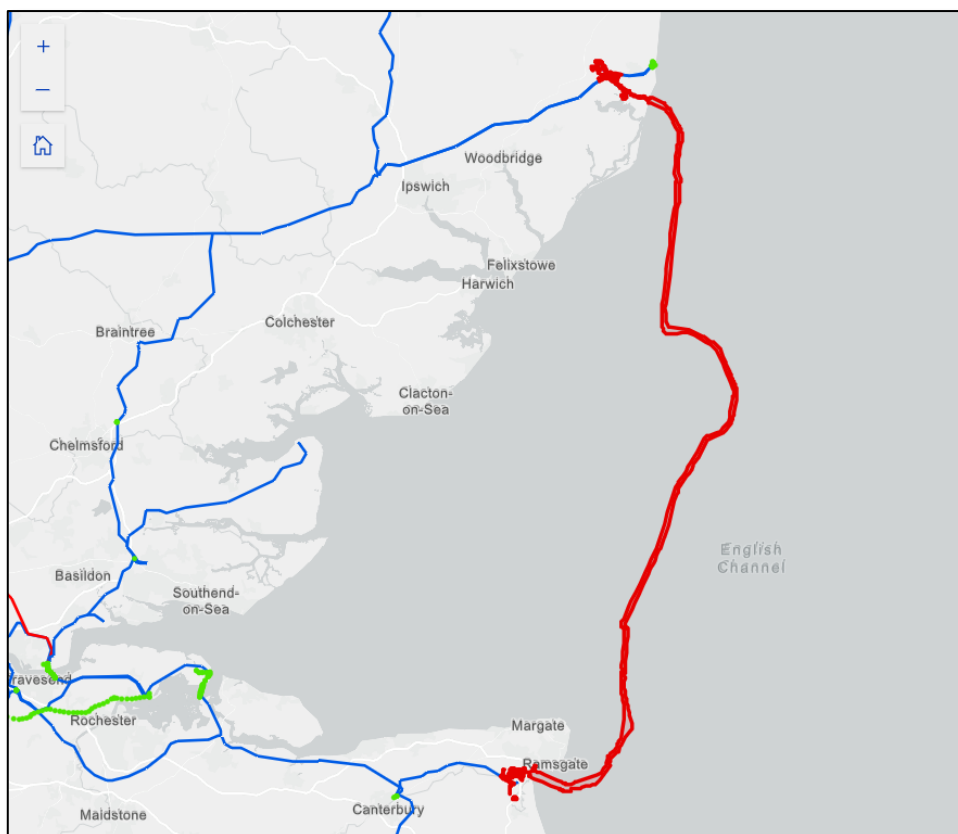
Sealink is a 130km long offshore cable with new onshore infrastructure allowing power to flow in either direction between Suffolk and Kent, depending on where renewable energy is being generated at that time and where in the country power is needed. The scheme's onshore infrastructure includes a converter station east of Saxmundham, substations and new underground and overhead electricity lines, as well as upgrading existing overhead electricity lines.

Details of the scheme can be found here:

<https://www.nationalgrid.com/the-great-grid-upgrade/sea-link>

An interactive map of the scheme can be seen here:

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/dc9df778577248738777772709f8a970>



Planning Inspectorate details of the project are here: [Sea Link - Project information](#)

Key updates to date:

- Sea Link held a series of topic workshops following statutory consultation to address concerns raised by SCC over the impact on the access network and amenity value for users.
- Sea Link undertook further, targeted, consultation introducing changes including an alteration to the cable route north of Aldeburgh, confirmation of the proposed access route to the converter station, changes to access and associated bridge over the River Fromus, and outlining how coordination with other NSIP projects had evolved.
- An on-going issue for SCC PRoW is to have green access treated as a separate theme within consultation. At present it is placed within 4 separate topic themes.
- On 23 April 2025 the Planning Inspectorate accepted the application for development consent for Sea Link.
- CC PRoW are working through various deadlines and are currently on deadline 6 and ISH3 (item specific hearing 3). We continue to ask for a route across the River Fromas (if the bridge is permanent), Bridleway route to the south of the B1119, and resurfacing of the Sluice path at Aldeburgh, as recommended by the RSPB. We have also stated that if the routes cannot be achieved, we request a financial contribution for mitigation, so we can implement these routes and works ourselves.

Latest update:

- The National Grid's Sea Link project—a planned 2GW high-voltage undersea electricity interconnector between Suffolk and Kent—has recently **completed its formal Examination stage**. The project is currently awaiting a final decision on its Development Consent Order (DCO) from the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

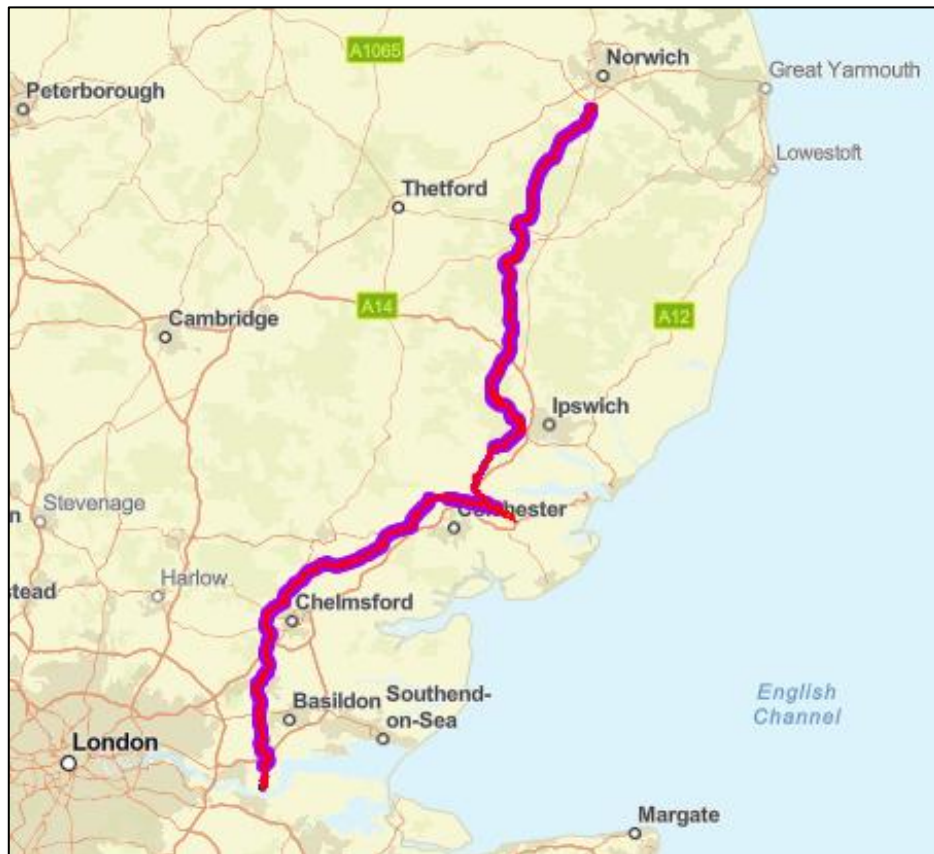
2. Norwich to Tilbury (formally East Anglia Green)

Norwich to Tilbury will reinforce the high voltage power network in East Anglia between existing substations at Norwich Main in Norfolk, Bramford in Suffolk, and Tilbury in Essex, as well as connect new offshore wind generation. The scheme will build approximately 160km of overhead lines and pylons, over 20km of underground cabling through the Dedham Vale National Landscape, and a new substation on the Tendring Peninsula.

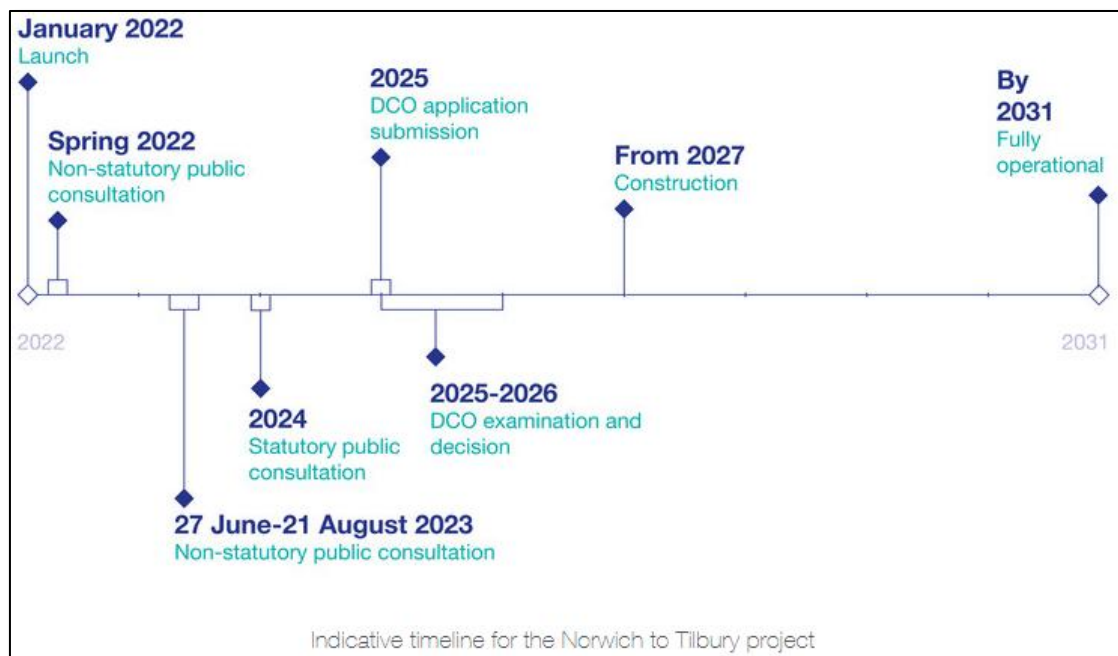
Details of the scheme can be found here: <https://www.nationalgrid.com/electricity-transmission/network-and-infrastructure/infrastructure-projects/norwich-to-tilbury>

An interactive map of the scheme can be found here:

<https://norwichtotilburymap.nationalgrid.com/>



The timetable published by National Grid is shown below.



Key updates to date:

- Statutory consultation took place in summer 2024.
- SLAF's responded to that consultation in July 2024
- National Grid provided an opportunity for feedback on the consultation with targeted consultations in Norfolk and Suffolk between January and March 2025. Details below:
- <https://www.nationalgrid.com/electricity-transmission/network-and-infrastructure/infrastructure-projects/norwich-to-tilbury/document-library#4257225834-1659806241-3>
- This scheme is in pre-application stage with the application expected to be submitted by August 2025. A link to the Planning Inspectorate website with further details is here: [Norwich to Tilbury - Project information](#)

Latest update:

- This is now in the examination stage, and we are working on statements of common ground and deadline 7 comments.
- The Norwich to Tilbury electricity transmission project—a 114-mile (180 km) pylon and cabling scheme proposed by National Grid—is currently in the **Examination stage**. This phase formally commenced in February 2026 and is scheduled to run for up to six months, ending in August 2026.

- Following the close of the Preliminary Meeting, the Planning Inspectorate will examine the proposals for a period of 6 months. The Examination opened on **10 February 2026** and closed on **10 August 2026**.

3. LionLink (formerly EUROLINK)

LionLink is a partnership between National Grid and Dutch partner TenneT to build a subsea cable between Great Britain and the Netherlands connecting a Dutch offshore windfarm to the GB and Dutch electricity grids.

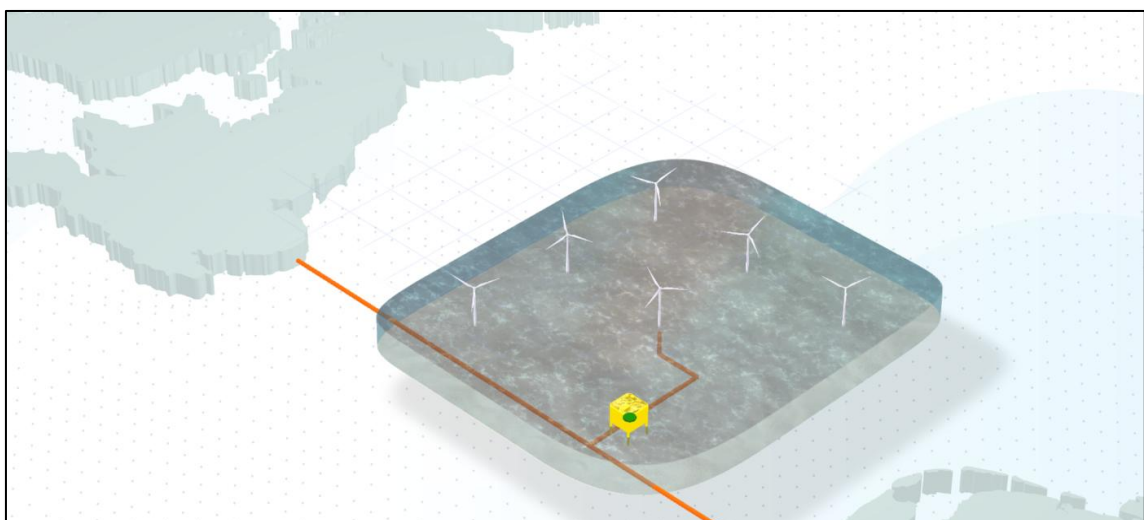
In Suffolk the scheme involves landfall of the subsea cable near Walberswick and the construction of an onshore cable corridor to a new onshore converter station east of Saxmundham. Onshore cabling will then link to an expanded National Grid substation at Friston (approved under the EA1North & 2 DCO consent). In Holland a new converter station is being constructed offshore.

Details of the scheme including an animation on proposals can be found here:

<https://www.nationalgrid.com/national-grid-ventures/lionlink/about>

The Planning Inspectorate website for information is here:

<https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/EN020033>



Key updates to date:

- Detailed responses have been submitted by SCC's rights of way and access team expressing concern over the cumulative effects on the PRow network of this project with other east coast NSIPs.
- The county council has pressed for a co-ordinated approach with other NSIPs for the cable corridor and design of the proposed converter station site.
- As with Sea Link, the PRow topic is split across different themes making responding less easy.
- The team have responded to Transport Assessments to protect the PRow network (such as PRow conditions, user surveys, construction methods, use of banksmen, permanent infrastructure, and PRow diversions).

Latest update:

- Walberswick has been selected as the landfall site.
- The current timeline is for the Development Consent Order to be submitted in 2026.
- National Grid Ventures, the Applicant for the LionLink proposals, has launched their Statutory Consultation, which will run from 13 January – 10 March 2026. The consultation documents can be viewed via the following link: - <https://www.nationalgrid.com/national-grid-ventures/lionlink/library>
- Seismic testing took place in June 2025 on Walberswick beach.
- Statutory consultation closed on 10th March 2026. We continue to ask for PROW links through and off site to connect to other keys routes and PROWs, along with open access.
- SLAF responded to the Lion Link project public consultation
- The latest stage of the LionLink project is an ongoing **targeted supplementary public consultation**. Running from **July 7 to August 5, 2026**, this phase focuses on localised design refinements and proposed changes, such as alternative landfall sites in **Walberswick** and adjustments to onshore construction and access areas.

4. EcoPower

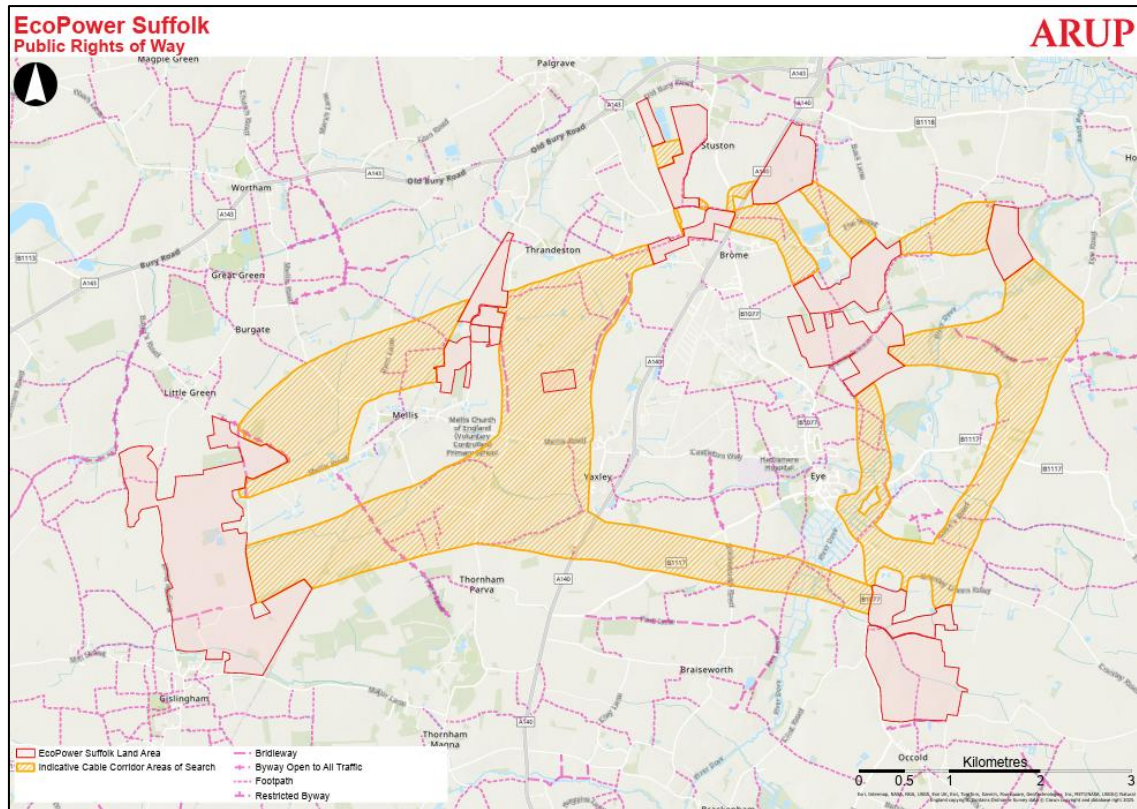
EcoPower Suffolk is a solar farm and a co-located Battery Energy Storage System and associated infrastructure with grid connection via underground cable to the Yaxley substation.

The project area extends close to various villages in the Mid Suffolk District including Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold. Collectively, the proposed energy farm will cover a land area of around 600ha.

EcoPower are aiming to submit their DCO application to PINS in 2026.

Details of the scheme can be found here:

<https://ecopowersuffolk.com/>



Key updates to date:

- Non-statutory consultation (Stage 1) with in-person and online consultation events took place in March 2025. <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/SCC-EcoPower-Suffolk-Non-Statutory-Consultation-Response.pdf>
- Public statutory consultation is expected to be held in the Autumn of 2025.
- EIA scoping request submitted and responded to in February 2026.

Latest update:

- The **EcoPower Suffolk** solar farm project is currently in the **pre-application stage** of the planning process. The developers are holding a statutory consultation period on updated plans before officially submitting a Development Consent Order (DCO) application.

5. White Elm

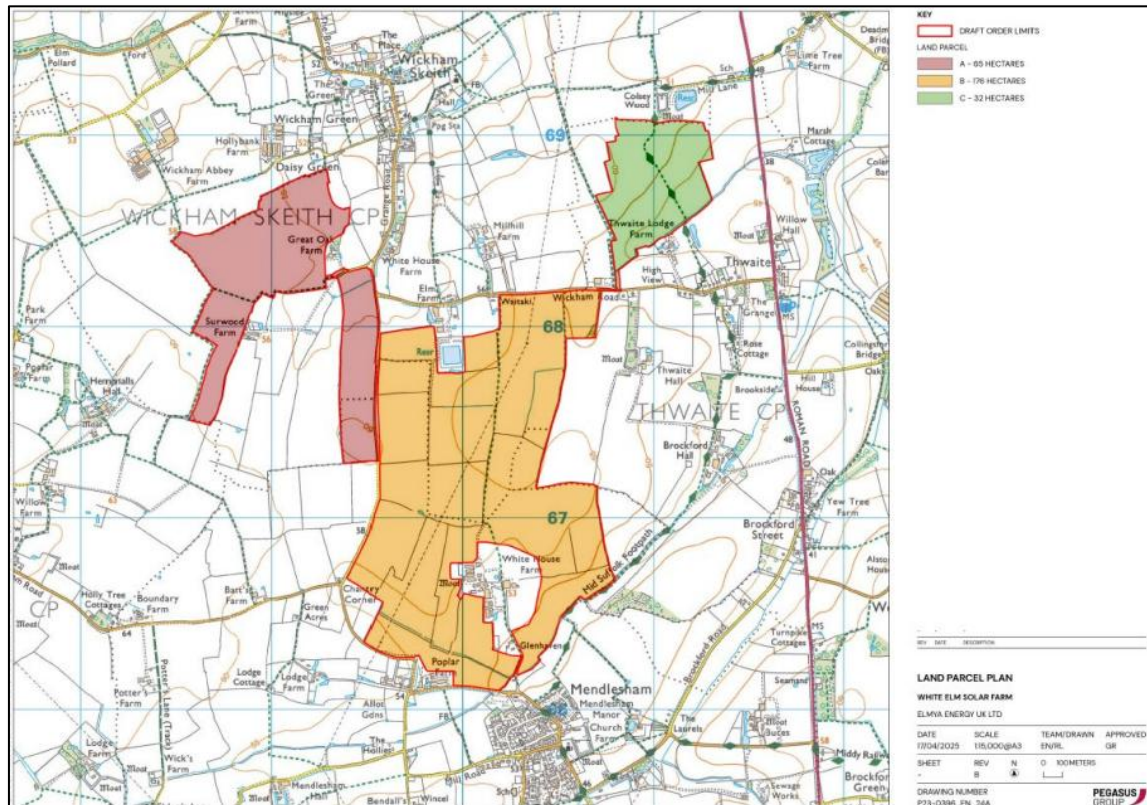
White Elm is a proposed solar farm and battery energy storage system (BESS) on land north of Mendlesham.

Details of the scheme including an animation on proposals can be found here:

<https://www.whiteelmsolarfarm.com/>

The Planning Inspectorate website for information is here:

<https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/EN0110003>



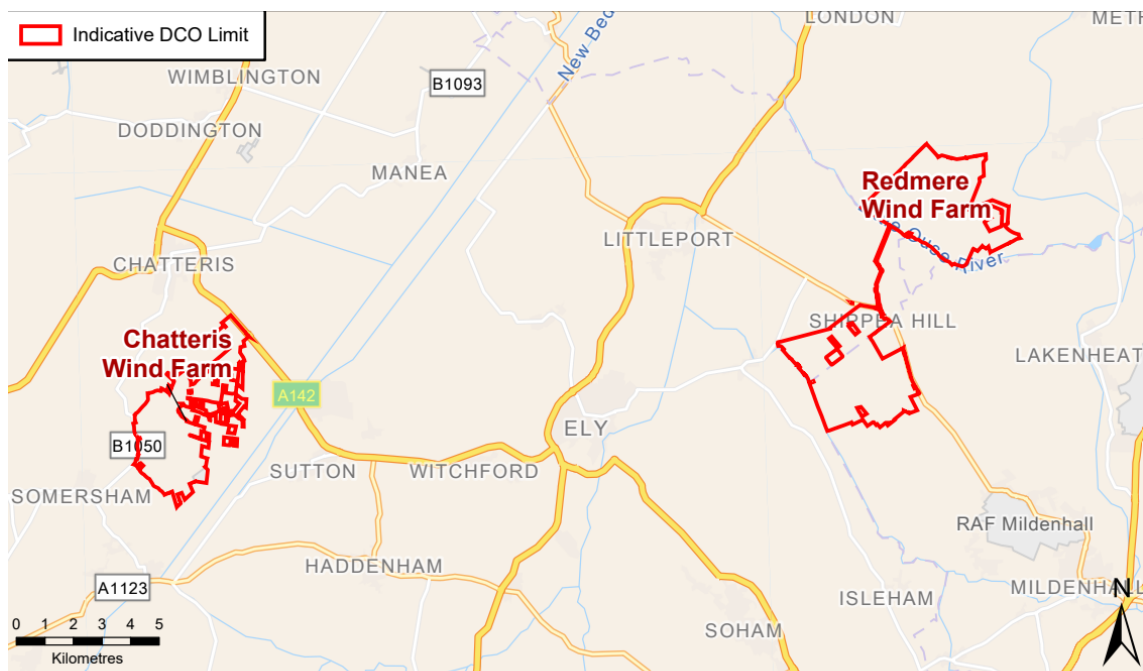
Latest update:

- From 19 May to 30 June 2025, White Elm ran a non-statutory consultation for local communities, wider stakeholders and consultees to feed into detailed designs to be shared at statutory consultation in winter 2025.
- On Saturday 24th May 2025 the following was posted on the project website by the promoter:
"The project team has taken a decision to pause development of the project indefinitely. Please note that the ongoing non-statutory consultation has been cancelled with immediate effect. This includes the two public consultation events on Saturday 31st May and Wednesday 4th June 2025. We ask that any work being undertaken to respond to the proposals shared in our non-statutory consultation be cancelled."
- No further update.

6. Redmere (Onshore Wind Farm)

Redmere is an Onshore Wind Farm NSIP of up to 32 turbines (300MW), with a tip height of up to 220 meters, and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). The proposed development would be located on the border of Suffolk (8 Turbines), Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. It would be located on agricultural land 7km north-west of Lakenheath and 10km north-east of Ely.

Further information on the project can be found on the <https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/EN0110042> And the applicants site <https://www.vattenfall.co.uk/our-projects/redmere>



Key updates to date:

Scoping and initial approach Sept/ Oct 2026.

- Currently in consultation for EIA scoping opinion.

7. North Suffolk Reservoir

North Suffolk Reservoir is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) developed by Essex and Suffolk Water, to construct a Winter Storage Reservoir. East Anglia is one of the driest parts of the country and has been confirmed by the Environment Agency as being a Serious Water Stressed Area. In Suffolk, Essex and Suffolk Water supply water to 300,000 people.

Essex and Suffolk Water are forecasting in their Water Resource Management Plan that there will not be enough water supply to meet forecasted demand over the next 25 years and beyond without additional investment.

A progress update on the North Suffolk Reservoir is expected in Spring / Summer 2026. Further information can be found on the Applicant's (Essex and Suffolk Water) website. <https://northsuffolkreservoir.co.uk/>

The project remains at a very early stage. Further information will be shared as Essex & Suffolk Water develops its next Water Resources Management Plan, which is expected to be published in draft form in 2028. We are committed to fully engaging with landowners, communities and their representatives throughout this process.

Key Updates to date:

- Been in workshops and consultation for pre app options.

8. Suffolk Water Recycling, Transfer and Storage (SWRTS)

The Applicant or Promoter for this project is Essex and Suffolk Water. Proposed Advanced Water Recycling Plant and strategic network enhancements, to be located in North Suffolk.

Essex and Suffolk Water (which is part of Northumbrian Water) are scoping the potential for delivering the projects set out in their Water Resource Management Plan 2024 (WRMP 24). Please view the [summary of the WRMP 24](#), or [full report of the WRMP 24](#) on the Essex and Suffolk Water website.

Find further information at [Suffolk Water Recycling, Transfer and Storage](#).



Key updates to date:

- Currently in consultation for EIA scoping opinion

Planning Inspectorate Project Stage	Non-statutory Consultation	Pre-Application	Acceptance	Pre-Examination	Examination	Recommendation	Decision
1. Sea Link							
2. Norwich to Tilbury							
3. LionLink							
4. EcoPower							
5. White Elm							
6. Redmere							
7. North Suffolk Reservoir							
8. SWRTS							

KEY:							
Stage Completed							
Stage In Progress							

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	Network Rail and Associated British Port Updates
Paper:	LAF 26/22
Author/Contact:	Steve Kerr / Andrew Woodin
Meeting:	Thursday 22 October 2026, 2:00pm - 4:00pm
Venue:	Endeavour House

Introduction

This paper updates the forum on the main level crossings being addressed by Network Rail (NR) and Suffolk County Council ('the Council' or 'SCC'), and progress on their Transport and Works Act proposals.

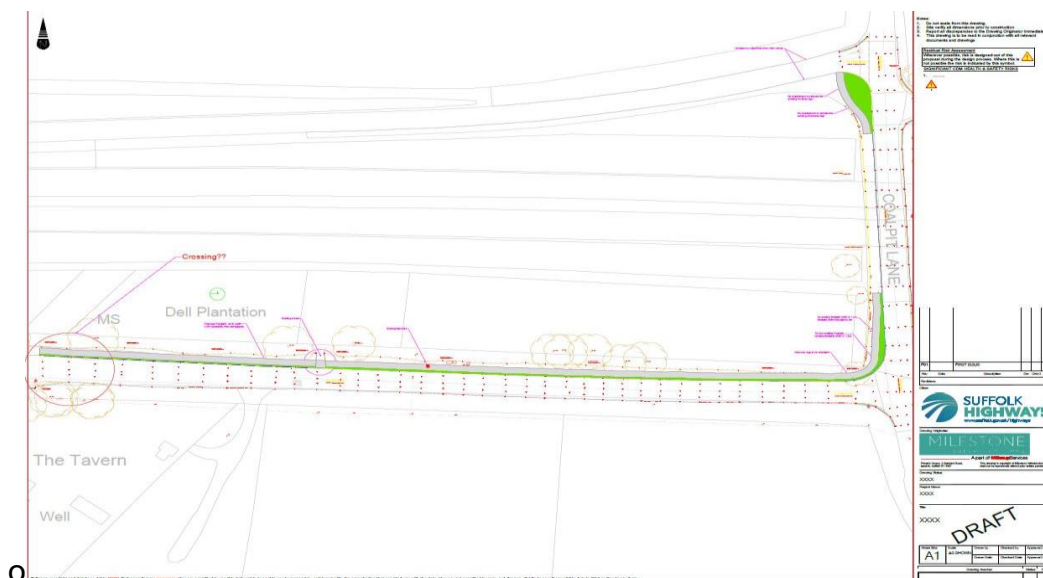
Needham Market Gipsy Lane and FP6 Needham Market



Officers still await the signing off of the Road Safety Audit (RSA3) and the submission of the outstanding documentation by the railway operator. This matter has now been escalated, and NR are currently compiling the requested information.

Higham – Highway Improvement Scheme

Officers were contacted by the M-Group design team in late July to discuss the original design that had been produced and had been the subject of review. Officers were advised that there were issues with the original design and its implantation was no longer feasible. M-Group officers attended onsite in August to note and record the on-ground constraints. A re-design is currently being worked on and M-Group have confirmed that the cost of this review will not fall to the client. Officers have stressed the importance of ensuring the cost of the new scheme is delivered within the total allocated budget of £140K.



Byway 38/Restricted Byway 38A Ipswich (Griffin Wharf)

Since the Forum was last updated on this item, officers have again recently contacted ABP's solicitors for an update on the work being undertaken to prepare the Magistrates Court stopping up and creation agreement documentation. In August they advised that this was taking longer than expected as they were looking to secure a further risk assessment for the operational railway.

Suffolk Road Rail Partnership /group (SRRPG)

The next meeting was originally scheduled for 9 October but has now been rescheduled for 4 December.

END SK/SCC October 2026

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title: New National Planning Policy Framework	
Paper:	LAF 26/23
Author/Contact:	Andrew Woodin
Meeting Date:	Thursday 22 October 2026 2:00pm - 4:00pm
Venue:	Endeavour House

1. Introduction

The Government published a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 17 August 2026. It replaces the December 2024 Framework and applies in England. The NPPF sets out national policies for preparing development plans and deciding planning applications. It is a material consideration of critical importance in both contexts.

The purpose of this paper is to draw the Forum's attention to those parts of the updated Framework which are particularly supportive of public rights of way, walking, wheeling and cycling, access to green space and the associated health and wellbeing benefits.

2. A new structure and stronger national policy

The Framework has been substantially restructured. The thematic chapters now distinguish between plan-making policies and national decision-making policies. The latter apply directly when planning applications are determined and should be read alongside the development plan.

This is important for green access because the new Framework does not treat public rights of way or active travel as isolated matters. They are connected to sustainable development, land use, good design, transport, green infrastructure, healthy communities and access to the countryside.

3. Public rights of way: Policy TR8

Policy TR8 is the clearest and most significant provision for the Forum's interests. It requires development proposals to:

- Protect and enhance the network of public rights of way, including through suitable diversions agreed with the highway authority; and

- Take opportunities to extend, link or improve the quality of existing routes where this enables better access to green spaces and the countryside; new direct and circular routes; connections between local and long-distance footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes; accessible, safe and convenient links to services and facilities; or improved connections with public transport stops and interchanges.

The Government strengthened the final wording following consultation. The draft policy referred to maintaining the network, whereas the adopted policy requires development proposals to “protect and enhance” it. The Government’s consultation response expressly recognises the importance of public rights of way to active travel and community wellbeing.

TR8 therefore provides a strong national basis for seeking more than the avoidance of harm. Where the circumstances of a development allow, it supports positive improvements such as missing links, safer crossings, better surfaces, improved accessibility, circular routes and connections to services, green spaces and public transport. Any diversion should be suitable and agreed with the highway authority.

4. Walking, wheeling and cycling

A number of transport policies reinforce TR8 and support the treatment of walking, wheeling and cycling as an integral part of development rather than an afterthought:

- TR1: sustainable transport should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making. Plans should identify and protect routes which widen transport choice, including walking, wheeling and cycling networks.
- TR2: parking standards should take account of opportunities for improvements in walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport.
- TR3: development should be located to support sustainable patterns of movement and good accessibility. In rural areas, opportunities to improve walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport and connectivity should be taken where they exist and can be supported by the development.
- TR4: transport considerations should be integral to development design, with priority given first to walking, wheeling and cycle movements within schemes and to neighbouring areas.
- CC2: development should accord with the sustainable transport policies so that sustainable patterns of movement are prioritised and opportunities to improve walking, wheeling and cycling are taken.

Together, these provisions support connected routes beyond a development boundary, not merely internal estate paths. They are relevant to site allocation, master planning, detailed design and the use of planning conditions or obligations where these meet the relevant legal and policy tests.

5. Health, green infrastructure and access to nature

The Framework also links movement, access and health:

- HC1 seeks healthy, inclusive and safe places, including by locating development where it will support walking, wheeling and cycling.
- DP3 expects development to incorporate or connect to high-quality, accessible and multifunctional green infrastructure that provides opportunities for recreation and healthy living. It also supports safe, inclusive and legible pedestrian and cycle routes for all ages and abilities.
- L1 encourages efficient use of land while securing multiple benefits, including mixed-use development that reduces the need to travel and net environmental gains such as improved public access to the countryside.
- GB5 recognises improved public access as a beneficial use of Green Belt land, where this is consistent with the purpose and openness of the Green Belt.
- N5 requires development on the coast not to hinder completion and maintenance of the King Charles III England Coast Path and supports improved public access where appropriate.

The overall effect is to recognise that good access infrastructure can deliver several benefits at once: everyday physical activity, social connection, access to services, recreation, contact with nature, lower-carbon travel and more attractive and inclusive places.

6. Implications for Suffolk and SLAF

For Suffolk, the updated NPPF strengthens the policy basis for public rights of way and active travel to be addressed early in Local Plans, site allocations, masterplans and planning applications. This is particularly relevant to strategic growth sites and large developments, where development can create or improve links between settlements, services, public transport, existing rights of way and the countryside.

The Framework should assist the County Council, as highway authority, in seeking coherent green access networks rather than fragmented provision. It should also help local planning authorities demonstrate how development supports healthy communities and sustainable travel.

The Forum may wish to use the policies when commenting on Local Plans and significant planning proposals, with particular attention to:

- protection of existing routes and their setting;
- new links which address gaps or severance in the network;
- direct and circular routes connecting homes, services, schools, employment, green space and public transport;
- accessibility, personal safety, surfacing and year-round usability; and delivery, funding, phasing and long-term maintenance of improvements.

The County Council's Green Access Planning Team is updating its standard planning responses and guidance to reflect the new policy references

7. Conclusion and recommendation

The 2026 NPPF is a positive development for public rights of way and green access. In particular, Policy TR8 establishes a clear expectation that development should protect and enhance the network and take opportunities to extend, link and improve routes. Supporting policies embed walking, wheeling, cycling, health and access to green space across transport, design and place-making.

Members are asked to note the updated Framework and consider how SLAF can use the new policies in its advice on Local Plans, major developments and other proposals affecting public access.

END

AW/SCC September 2026

Sources: National Planning Policy Framework, August 2026, GOV.UK; Government response to the NPPF consultation, 17 August 2026; SCC internal note “NPPF August 2026 File Copy”.

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title: Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution: Update for Suffolk	
Paper:	LAF 26/24
Author/Contact:	Andrew Woodin
Meeting Date:	Thursday 22 October 2026 2:00pm - 4:00pm
Venue:	Endeavour House

1. Purpose

This paper updates the Forum on the current position in Suffolk. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution are separate projects. The position has changed materially since the Forum considered LGR in July 2026.

2. Local Government Reorganisation

On 7 September 2026, the Government withdrew its earlier decision to replace Suffolk County Council and the five district and borough councils with three unitary councils. The Government also announced a rapid review of the LGR programme.

- There is currently no LGR proposal in place for Suffolk.
- The withdrawn decision cannot simply be restarted without a new formal decision by the Secretary of State.
- The Government has not yet confirmed whether it will reconsider the existing Suffolk proposals, invite new proposals, or end the programme in Suffolk.
- Elections in May 2027 are now expected to proceed on the existing district and borough council boundaries, rather than as elections to shadow unitary authorities.

The work completed through the Future Suffolk programme remains useful evidence and learning, but implementation of the proposed three-council model is no longer proceeding on the previous timetable.

3. Implications for SLAF

The July paper considered how Local Access Forum arrangements might be reconstituted if Suffolk County Council were abolished and new unitary access authorities created. That remains relevant background, but no immediate decision is now required.

- Suffolk County Council remains the appointing and access authority, and the Suffolk Local Access Forum continues on its present statutory basis.
- The previously anticipated vesting date of 1 April 2028 and the proposed three successor councils should no longer be treated as confirmed.
- Options for separate or joint successor LAF arrangements should be revisited only when Government has made a fresh formal decision and the future access authorities and timetable are clear.
- In the meantime, SLAF can continue to maintain a countywide view and identify strategic access matters that should be protected under any future governance model.

4. Devolution

Devolution is continuing separately from LGR. It would transfer selected powers and funding from central government to a Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Strategic Authority, focused on strategic matters rather than day-to-day council services.

- The proposed Strategic Authority has not yet been established and no functions have transferred.
- Norfolk and Suffolk must give local consent to the required statutory arrangements, followed by secondary legislation in Parliament.
- Suffolk County Council is due to consider local consent at Cabinet on 15 October 2026. Norfolk is expected to consider consent later in October.
- If the necessary approvals are secured, current planning is for the Strategic Authority to be established in early 2027 and for the inaugural mayoral election to be held in May 2028.

5. Relevance to public access

The proposed Strategic Authority would have an important strategic role in areas including transport and infrastructure, housing and spatial planning, economic growth, climate resilience and wider public service reform. These areas may affect walking, cycling, public rights of way and access to green space in some way, especially where active travel is involved. It is likely tourism and economic development will be a priority for a new mayor, and hence for green access the King Charles III England Coast Path.

Devolution, however, would not itself abolish Suffolk's existing councils or transfer the county council's current access authority duty. Any change to the body responsible for the statutory LAF would arise through LGR or other legislation, not from devolution alone.

6. Recommendation

The Forum is invited to:

- Note the withdrawal of the previous LGR decision and that there is currently no replacement proposal or confirmed timetable for Suffolk;
- Note that devolution is continuing as a separate programme, subject to local consent and Parliamentary approval;
- Agree that the July 2026 paper should be retained as background but that detailed work on successor LAF arrangements should be paused until the LGR position is clearer; and
- Consider whether it wishes to highlight any countywide access priorities that should inform future LGR or devolution arrangements.

Sources: MHCLG Suffolk LGR collection and withdrawal announcement, 7 September 2026; Suffolk County Council LGR and Devolution updates, September 2026. Position correct at 29 September 2026.