

Smarter Simpler Better One Suffolk

Business Summary



Suffolk and proud

Suffolk is a place that we are proud to call home. It's a historic county with understated charm and character. But it's also a place that's on the cutting edge of technology and industry.

Suffolk is diverse and vibrant – an exciting mix of larger urban areas, market towns, coastal communities and rural villages. Its people come from all walks of life. Yet despite this variety, we have a single, strong and binding sense of identity and belonging. This is evident in things like Suffolk Day, the Suffolk Show, the University of Suffolk, Suffolk-wide local media and the good old Suffolk Trinity (comprising the Suffolk Punch horse, the Redpoll cattle and the Suffolk Sheep). There is even a Suffolk

way of saying things that lives on through the ages – the blockbuster film “The Dig” had this in spades!

We're home to nationally and internationally significant businesses, from clean energy, ports and logistics, agriculture, digital technology, advanced manufacturing, the horseracing industry and tourism - not to mention some of the best food and drink you can buy. Suffolk is home to over 31,000 businesses, including household names like Adnams, Aspell, and Greene King.

Suffolk is one of only a few UK areas which has consistently been a net financial contributor to national wealth. The county's £21 billion

economy has averaged 3.3% annual growth over the past decade.

Additionally, Suffolk is home to multiple strategic assets that provide both national and international benefit. Felixstowe Port handles 36% of UK container trade, while Freeport East offers a major opportunity for trade and investment, and the A14 Corridor provides a vital east-west freight and business route.

Suffolk is a truly special place. It deserves the best support we can give it, so it can fulfil its true potential. That's where local government reorganisation comes in.



Staff at Suffolk Food Hall - Credit: Suffolk Food Hall, Oliver Paul



A large container at Felixstowe docks

Local government reorganisation

The government wants to simplify how councils operate in Suffolk – a process called local government reorganisation (LGR).

Currently, there are six councils: a county council, four districts and a borough. This structure has been in place for more than 50 years. Until now.

One Suffolk is a proposal for bold and

positive change: to bring all six councils together into a single new council, delivering all local and county-wide services. This will be smarter, simpler and better for Suffolk – and will save millions of pounds which can be reinvested in public services, driving economic growth and keeping council tax as low as possible.

Out with the old, in with the new

This would mean completely scrapping the existing district, borough and

county councils (including Suffolk County Council) and replacing them with one new organisation, complete with a fresh structure, culture, less bureaucracy and better ways of working. It would be a completely new start – an opportunity to reset and take the best bits from the current councils whilst getting rid of the bits that don't work well for residents, businesses and communities across the county.

One Suffolk – learning from businesses to be better for businesses

One Suffolk will not only be smarter, simpler and better, it will also offer greater financial resilience, sustainability and be connected to and reflective of the communities it serves, and this includes the businesses and industries of Suffolk.

It is all too easy for councils (of any size or structure) to forget that they must operate successfully with many of the same challenges as faced by businesses. Whether it's recruiting the right people, investing in the right technology or systems or having the right product or service for the customer, we have more in common than many realise.

Over the summer we held a number of business engagement sessions, and we listened carefully to what businesses were telling us.

Businesses need a local authority that:

- Understands that every real-world impact, whether it's a road closure for repairs, a delayed planning decision or introducing a new way of reporting something, can potentially add additional costs to business.
- Minimises the bureaucracy it creates, recognising that businesses already have too many barriers to navigate through without needlessly creating more, especially without consultation with businesses first.
- Is forward-thinking, anticipating the challenges of the future and prepared to help residents, communities and businesses to adjust successfully.

One Suffolk gets it – we want all businesses to be successful in Suffolk, and the work to achieve that must



The Adnams Headquarters in Southwold

start with getting the basics of our own organisation right first. We believe a single authority for Suffolk, one that builds on the strengths of our existing communities without creating

unnecessary divisions and multiple versions of itself across the county, is the right first step.

One Suffolk – the right amount of risk for the right level of reward

Any successful business has to manage the competing values of risk versus reward – and this is true within **One Suffolk** too. We have looked carefully at the financial analysis, set against the pervading background of ever reducing budgets from central government, ever increasing need for essential public services, such as adult social care and children's services, and the fast-paced world of assistive technology.

The **One Suffolk** plans, just like you would for any other business, have been properly risk assessed. They come backed with independent

financial analysis by experts at Grant Thornton, which is based upon the true Suffolk experience – not an amalgamated blend of other councils as used in business cases around the country.

We know and have explored the risks associated with scrapping existing local councils which have lasted for half a century, alongside the risks and benefits of creating an entirely new council for the whole of Suffolk. With **One Suffolk**, we believe we have the right balance of risk and reward.

Investing in towns and markets – making them work for you

Our market towns could be home to many thriving businesses, but don't always boast the right conditions to allow enterprise to succeed. From parking that makes sense for traders and customers, to initiatives to boost footfall – **One Suffolk** is firmly on the side of business and the business case contains measures to really drive forward local economic growth. This

includes giving our market towns access to a £40 million capital investment fund, and conducting a review of car parking and town centre markets across the county – all in consultation with traders, businesses and representative organisations.

Our residents' survey was clear that access to towns, bars, restaurants,

shopping and retail is important to the public and we are determined to support the businesses who help facilitate that. **One Suffolk** will focus on local economic priorities identified by local businesses and communities.



Ipswich Waterfront

Tell us once – rather than three times

From our engagement with business owners, we have heard loud and clear about some of the frustrations you feel when working with local government. You can rest assured that with **One Suffolk** there would be no wrong 'front door' when contacting

the local authority. With named contacts and locally-based staff, there would be no need to be passed about between three different councils and multiple departments.

There would also be no conflicting

information handed out. Basing your company in Suffolk, you could be confident that the same rules and regulations would apply – wherever you are based in the county.

Planning made simple

We know that business owners often feel that our local planning framework is not fit for purpose. Change is needed – and Suffolk would be better served by having a single and unified planning framework that delivers consistency, efficiency and strategic alignment. Rather than dealing with multiple planning and licensing authorities, all with different policies and procedures, **One Suffolk** would give business a single council to deal with countywide. The goal is to build a planning system, including local planning committees with councillors

who know the area, which is not only faster and more consistent but also smarter, more responsive and better aligned with Suffolk's long-term economic ambitions. The scale of **One Suffolk** would allow it to attract and retain high-quality staff in specialist aspects of services like building control, preventing the new council being a blocker due to a lack of expertise.

Through **One Suffolk** we will have a planning process that is easy for all – including businesses.

A strong voice for investment

Powering, feeding and connecting the UK - Suffolk, along with Norfolk, has a significant economic contribution to make. Soon, Suffolk and Norfolk will have a new mayor – giving us access to an investment fund of £37.4 million per year. We have seen from other parts of the country how mayors choose to use this funding – and it's on the things that matter to business, such as infrastructure and workforce skills.

Devolution will also give us a unified voice in Westminster. By working closely with the mayor, **One Suffolk** will focus on identifying clear investment priorities that make the most of the benefits of devolution and align with national priorities such as clean energy and economic growth. This transformation is not simply about structural change; it is about unlocking the full potential of Suffolk so that businesses can benefit.



The Anchor public house in Woodbridge



Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds

One Suffolk – the right choice for business

Put simply, **One Suffolk** is a proposal rooted in common sense. It would be smarter, simpler and better for Suffolk. It is also a proposal that makes business sense. We want Suffolk to be the natural choice for businesses to be set up, and to offer the best conditions for established companies to thrive.

Saving taxpayers' money

Our detailed analysis of local data, using real life examples from elsewhere in the country, shows that having one council will **save** £78.2 million in the first five years and £39.4 million each year thereafter. In contrast, setting up three councils would **cost** an additional £145.3 million in the first five years. In short, it would be cheaper to stay as we are than move to having three councils!



The Earsham Street Delicatessen in Bungay

Table 01: Summary of costs and savings from three options: local government reorganisation in Suffolk

	One unitary council (£m)	Two unitary councils (£m)	Three unitary councils (£m)
Total annual benefit	£39.7m	£21.1m	£14.3m
Five-year break up costs	£0	-£67.6m	-£135.2m
Savings in first five years	£78.2m	-£48.0m	-£145.3m
Annual savings after five years	£39.4m	£7.3m	-£13.1m



The EpiCentre in Haverhill Research Park

Three councils, same old story

Suffolk's district and borough councils have also submitted a LGR proposal to the government, in their case to create three councils covering Suffolk.

To be fully informed, you should read their plan – but there is a big problem with it. To come up with their financial analysis and savings figures, they have used promises contained in business cases and reorganisation plans from elsewhere in the country – not the

actual savings that have been achieved. Their plan admits this, and it means there is massive doubt around the savings they promise.

Also, their plan to form three new councils introduces additional risks of competition for investment across the county. Three councils mean three voices all competing for key investment with the new mayor and national government. This creates

unnecessary rivalries and competition, when councils should be working together for the benefit of the county, not just their district.

Furthermore, businesses who trade across the county will have to deal with different councils with differing economic priorities. We've already heard that many find the current structure confusing when it comes to knowing who to contact, and this will be no different with three councils for Suffolk – the only change will be you have a choice of three and not six.

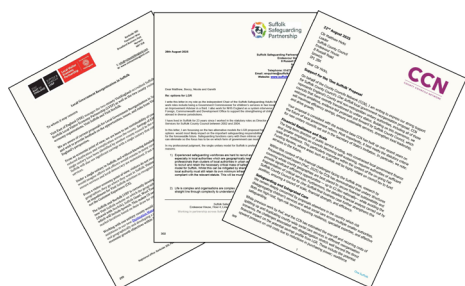
We firmly believe that their business case lacks robust evidence.



The Orwell Bridge in Ipswich

Support for One Suffolk

The **One Suffolk** proposal is being supported publicly by leaders from a broad range of different industries. These include the tourism, business, health, social care and agriculture sectors. Some of these people have voiced real concerns with the alternative proposal to split Suffolk into three unitary authorities.



More information and next steps

One Suffolk will be delivered in four phases: Prepare → Transition → Stabilise → Transform. Businesses will continue to be consulted throughout, with opportunities to shape local economic strategies and investment priorities.

This business summary boils down the full 313-page business case, which is available to read on www.onesuffolkcouncil.co.uk

The government is now considering the plan and will decide whether or not to include it in a public consultation in the coming months. We hope you will take part when the time comes.

If you want to keep up to date on **One Suffolk** and the government's consultation, you can subscribe to our fortnightly newsletter at www.onesuffolkcouncil.co.uk/newsletter