

Smarter Simpler Better One Suffolk

Residents' 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, digital technology, advanced manufacturing, the horseracing industry and tourism - not to mention

some of the best food and drink you can buy. Farming in Suffolk is deeply woven into our local economy and lives.

Together, Suffolk is one of only a few areas in the UK that has consistently been a net financial contributor to national wealth and prosperity.

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.



An aerial view of Framlingham Castle



Racehorse training in Newmarket

Local government reorganisation

The government wants to simplify how councils operate in Suffolk – a process called local government reorganisation (LGR). It's a chance to fix the things that frustrate residents and communities about local councils.

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 and keeping council tax as low as possible.

Out with the old, in with the new

This would mean completely scrapping all the existing 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.

The big benefits of One Suffolk

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.

This is a rare opportunity to bring together those services that make a real difference to Suffolk's people, places and businesses. Key services, such as planning, parking, transport, environmental health, licensing and economic development are better delivered in a more strategic, efficient and integrated way.

This will help to create safer, cleaner and more attractive environments for businesses to thrive and residents and visitors to enjoy.

There are many tangible benefits to **One Suffolk**, but these are some of the most significant:

Low Council Tax and more financial resilience

Improved financial strength will enable the new unitary council to free up public money for frontline services – like highways and bin collection – and keeping Council Tax as low as possible. We know that people who live in Suffolk will want to see and feel improvements from day one of the new authority. That's why our plan is for all the different Council Tax rates to be harmonised to the lowest current level in Suffolk (this is the Mid Suffolk area) in its first year. Based on band D homes, this would put back in your pockets between £17 and £245 a year.

£40 million new deal for market towns

Our market towns are among the jewels in the crown of Suffolk, but high streets nationally are struggling and need help. To drive local economic growth, we propose our market towns – from the smallest to the biggest –



The Willis Building in Ipswich at night

have access to a £40 million capital investment fund. Working in consultation with traders, businesses and representative organisations, a review of car parking and town centre markets across the county would be held. **One Suffolk** will focus on local economic priorities identified by local communities. Our residents' survey was clear that access to towns, bars, restaurants, shopping and retail is important.

Communities empowered to lead

One Suffolk will empower communities by offering powers and funding to town and parish councils, where these councils want to do more and feel they can make a difference. New powers could include making decisions on minor planning applications, naming streets and making decisions about local speed limits. This will be achieved through partnership working, supported by 16 new area committees – as successfully

rolled out in Wiltshire. Easy to access, locally based, named staff that work face-to-face is key - especially in areas like highways where relations and trust need to be built and maintained. This will give a voice to communities with clearer accountability, stronger local leadership and more responsive service design.

A proactive highways service

Freed up money means we can revitalise Suffolk's highways service so it can say "yes" more often – acting swiftly, communicating clearly and delivering results. It needs a senior leadership team that is committed to being visible, respectful and accessible – engaging openly with businesses and communities to drive progress together. **One Suffolk** will be a responsive community partner that wants to get things done right first time.

Unified, consistent and locally shaped planning

Suffolk would be better served by having a single and unified planning framework that delivers greater consistency, efficiency and strategic alignment. This reform will be guided by evidence, shaped by local engagement and implemented with care to preserve community identity and local knowledge. The goal is to build a planning system, including local planning committees with councillors who know the area, that is not only faster and more consistent but also smarter, more responsive and better aligned with Suffolk's long-term ambitions.

A modern, tech-driven innovative council

One Suffolk will mirror businesses in the county – using technology and innovation to save money and prepare for future challenges. This would include making use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to predict and address the needs of the community more effectively. This

approach will make best use of staff, improve accessibility and support informed decision-making around council finances and resources. This frees up our staff to spend more time working directly with you – how a council should work.

A resilient and growing local economy

Suffolk needs a strong, flourishing and resilient local economy that serves all residents, businesses and communities. To achieve this, planning, housing, transport, environmental health, licensing and economic development need to work together better. **One Suffolk** will ensure these are delivered in a more efficient and joined-up way, making it easier for businesses and entrepreneurs. A centralised economic development team will champion local enterprise, attract investment, promote tourism and work proactively with partners such as the Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement Districts and Destination Management Organisations.

A strong voice for Suffolk and its future

Soon, Suffolk and Norfolk will have a new mayor, so Suffolk will be better served by a strong and unified voice to speak up for the county. By working closely with the mayor, **One Suffolk** will also ensure that Suffolk's diverse communities and areas are celebrated and that investment is strategically directed to enhance connectivity between places, people and businesses. This partnership will focus on identifying clear investment priorities that maximise the benefits of devolution. This transformation is not simply about structural change; it is about unlocking the full potential of Suffolk so that businesses and residents can benefit. **One Suffolk** is committed to collaborating with residents, businesses and stakeholders to ensure that the county remains vibrant, sustainable and fit for the future.



Looking through the Abbey Gate in Abbey Gardens, towards Angel Hill in Bury St Edmunds

A proposal shaped by people like you

The **One Suffolk** proposal has been developed following the most extensive resident and stakeholder engagement Suffolk County Council has delivered in the past decade. This included two public surveys (one of which received 8,189 responses from across every part of the county), over 60 face-to-face and online events with town and parish councils, voluntary and community groups, businesses and residents all fed into our proposal.

One of the most significant findings from this work is how much people identify with being from Suffolk, the importance of meeting local needs and support for streamlining public services.

Our business case has support from people across Suffolk, including leaders in the NHS, business and culture sectors. You can pledge your support too at www.onesuffolkcouncil.co.uk



Shoppers in Felixstowe High Street

The most detailed, realistic and local plan

To create the best and most realistic plan, we've used up-to-date, Suffolk-specific local information and data – like council budgets, population figures and staffing costs. Everything has been thoroughly checked and double-checked – with support from experts from professional service firm Grant Thornton.

We've made a conscious decision to be cautious when predicting how much money can be saved, because we don't want to over-promise and under-deliver, as has been the case elsewhere in the country when they have gone through this process. For example, when we've modelled possible savings, rather than looking at

what LGR plans from other parts of the country promised, we looked at what they actually achieved. Real life, real understanding, real outcomes for residents.

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!



Eye Church

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		-£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 Gull Wing Bridge in Lowestoft

Three councils, same old story

Suffolk's district and borough councils have also submitted an 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.

Nothing is more important than protecting the most vulnerable in our county, but their plan for delivering

social care is dangerous. Splitting up social care risks creating a postcode lottery of services depending on where you live, makes it harder for councils to pay a fair amount for the care it buys for residents and reduces the chance of making big countywide investment in new technology. Fragmenting social care risks disrupting critical public services that will affect the very people who need stability the most – vulnerable residents.

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

This residents' 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