

Smarter Simpler Better One Suffolk

Town and parish council 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 home to a network of 372 town and parish councils and 56 parish meetings. These local bodies form the bedrock of community democracy – giving residents a voice, shaping local priorities and driving grassroots action. However, many councils have told us they feel undervalued and overlooked, rather than recognised for the vital work they do. That must change. We need a strong, respectful partnership that can deliver together.

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.

Local government reorganisation

LGR means completely scrapping the existing district, borough and county councils (this includes 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 town and parish councils and, through them, residents.



Market Hill in Sudbury

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 efficient and streamlined 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:

Communities empowered to lead

One Suffolk will empower communities by offering more powers such as setting speed limits, grass and verge cutting and planning. Where councils want to do more, and feel they can make more of a difference, **One Suffolk** stands ready to support them. This will be achieved through partnership working, supported by 16 new area committees – as successfully rolled out in Wiltshire. These committees will bring together councillors from the new council, town and parish councils, residents and groups like charities and businesses. Their job is to assess what matters most in each area – things like roads, planning, safety and employment – and make sure local voices are heard. For town and parish councils, this means having a stronger voice, with tangible decision-making and funding powers and greater opportunity to



An aerial view of Framlingham Castle

work together with others to improve their community.

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

The savings **One Suffolk** creates 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. Parish councils told us during our initial engagement sessions that they wanted more say and control over local planning decisions. We will deliver this with new powers for Town and Parish councils including the devolution of minor development control functions over things like house extensions and minor changes to existing buildings. 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.

£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 – 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.

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.

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 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.



Playground at Clare Country Park

A new approach grounded in partnership

The **One Suffolk** plan is built on a truly collaborative relationship with town and parish councils. Our proposed new model of governance will recognise the diversity of councils across Suffolk – some well-established and experienced, others still developing – and will offer tailored support accordingly.

This new relationship won’t be distant or imposed, nor ad hoc or infrequent. Instead, it will be based on genuine partnership, face-to-face and with ongoing dialogue and flexible support that reflects the ambitions and capacity of each council.

Our commitments to you

We have developed a bespoke support package to empower town and parish councils, which includes:

- a **Partnership Charter**, formally recognising the role of local councils and creating a new level of respect for them, their voice and their experiences in local decision-making.
- **bespoke training** for councillors and clerks on relevant topics – for example safeguarding, AI, and data security
- **technical and digital** support, including help with website

development to standardise how information is shared with the public

- **guidance on funding**, including how to find and apply for grants
- **direct access** by phone and email to dedicated town, parish and locality team contacts
- the right to request **officer attendance** at local meetings
- access to **shared services**, including favourable rates for printing, catering, IT procurement and more.

We also propose a new town council for Ipswich to provide the same level of local representation as the rest of Suffolk, while ensuring retention of our county town’s historic identity and civic heritage.

Opportunities for more influence and responsibility

Many councils also expressed interest in taking on more influence and responsibility, where appropriate. In response to feedback, including from SALC, we have developed an initial list of services and assets that could be devolved to councils with the desire to do more. This will be a completely voluntary process.



Houses in Needham Market

Assets	Services
• Cemeteries and church yards • Memorials • Crematoria • Public toilets • Local parks • Open spaces • Sports grounds • Swimming pools • Leisure and arts centres • Play areas • Roadside verges and other small open spaces	• Minor highways functions and public rights of way • (e.g. speed limits, gritting) • Minor development control functions • Soft estate (e.g. grass cutting and weeds) • Fly-tipping clearance • Street cleaning • Community transport • Community safety • Neighbourhood watch • Footpath lighting • Community grants • Isolation/volunteering/befriending initiatives • Partnering in local tourism initiatives • Partnering in local climate change initiatives • Street naming • Licensing (e.g. event notices, street trading)

A proposal shaped by town and parish councils

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.



A street in Aldeburgh

Your feedback has shaped this approach. Through widespread face-to-face and online engagement events, we heard concerns about:

- loss of local representation and knowledge due to fewer councillors (reduction from 308 county and district councillors to 140 under **One Suffolk**)
- urban priorities overshadowing rural voices
- poor communication with county and district councils and a desire for more direct, face-to-face engagement
- a bureaucratic and unresponsive planning system that often ignores town and parish input
- parish councils feeling under-

resourced and fear that LGR will increase responsibilities without adequate support

- how savings will be used and whether Council Tax harmonisation will be fair
- centralisation of services and loss of local access.

Each of these concerns has directly influenced the design of the **One Suffolk** model, and our commitment is to continue listening and talking as it evolves.

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

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 have 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	£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



Racehorse training in Newmarket

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.

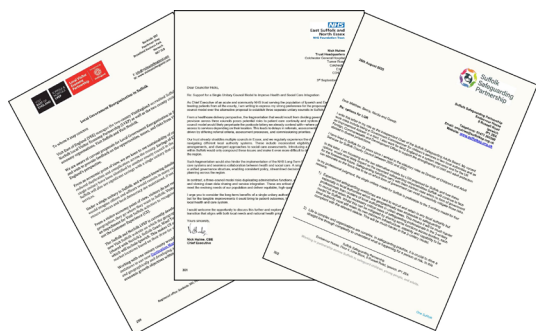
We firmly believe that their business case lacks robust evidence.



Two ladies looking out to sea in Felixstowe

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 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