

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	Agenda
Meeting Date:	Thursday 23 July 2026 1:00pm - 3:00pm
Author/Contact:	Andrew Woodin
Venue:	The Fromus Centre Saxmundham

		Paper Number
1.	13:00 Welcome, apologies and housekeeping	
2.	13.05 Minutes of previous meeting	LAF 26/12
3.	13.15 Declaration of interest	
4.	13.20 Welcome to new county council member representative	
5.	13.30 Site visit discussion	
6.	13.40 NSIPs approved	AR LAF 26/13
7.	13.50 NSIPs in consultation including EcoPower	SDB LAF 26/14
8.	14.00 Review of working groups	
	<u>PRoW severance</u> BH, CP, RW, CB	
	<u>NSIPs</u> SB, BH, RW, AW, GM	
	<u>KCIII ECP</u> BH, SM, RW	
	<u>Planning & development</u> RW, MP, AW, MH, CB	
9.	14.10 Local Government reorganisation	AW LAF 26/15
10.	14.20 King Charles III England Coast Path	CD LAF 26/16
11.	14.30 Network Rail	SK LAF 26/17
12.	14.40 Public Question Time	
13.	14.45 Any other business	
14.	14.55 Dates & venues of future meeting	
	15.00 End	

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	NSIPS Approved (Sizewell C, SPR East Anglia, Bramford to Twinstead)
Paper:	LAF 26/13
Author/Contact:	Annette Robinson
Meeting:	Thursday 23 July 2026, 1:00pm - 3:00pm
Venue:	The Fromus Centre Saxmundham

Sizewell C

SZC produce a monthly update on their website that summarises the current general works situation.

[Project Update - June 2026 - Sizewell C Works Tracker](#)

SCC continue to press for current and accurate information to be advertised on the tracker and on site to give residents and visitors that despite the considerable construction works, the confidence to still use the walking, cycling & riding network.

Current activities affecting PROW & Access

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

There are now managed crossing points or temporary closures and alternative routes in place for the 11 public footpaths that are bisected by the SLR. Control measures for the crossing points are agreed and monitored by SCC. Closures with alternative routes are negotiated with and approved by SCC before the public footpath can be closed. Alternative routes are signed on site and shown on the SZC tracker. Works are expected to take 2 years.

SZC have applied to the Secretary of State for a non-material amendment to the development consent order which amongst other matters, includes amending the Rights of Way Plans to better reflect the detailed designs of the new roads with respect to the rights of way. SCC have generally welcomed the amendments to the ROW Plans whilst also highlighting other errors and omissions from these plans.

On the TVB, only 1 of the 4 affected public footpaths is currently closed with an alternative route in place. The remaining 3 are expected to close in stages throughout the construction phase with alternative routes provided.

Main site works

Bridleway 19 remains open and there have been short term, localised diversions approved and monitored by SCC, to enable works such as installation of power cables, drainage, surfacing of the access road and installation of the rail line. There are currently two locations where roads and rail line cross over the bridleway both managed with security staff and traffic marshals. However, due to delays in other workstreams, the bridleway is coming under increasing pressure as construction roads are required by SZC to link the temporary construction area in the east with the campus site and the main site roundabout (once built) in the west. The DCO allows for the full bridleway to be temporarily closed once there is a suitable alternative route in place and this alternative is described in the Rights of Way Strategy and DCO but has only been partly constructed. The proposed completion date for the new inland alternative bridleway is in Q2 2027

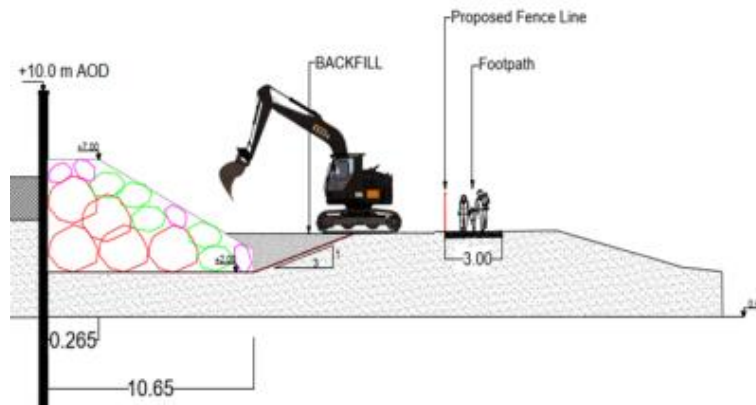
The new rail line into the main construction area crossing over several footpaths has now been installed and is only currently being used by trains connected to building the rail line. Measures have been put in place to ensure safe passage during this construction phase including the permanent diversion of 3 footpaths north of Leiston.

On the coast

Marine Bulk Import Facility (MBIF) - construction continues over the diverted coast path with a managed crossing point.



Coastal Path – There is a current discharge of requirement regarding a further diversion of the coast path to enable installing rock armour seaward of the sheet piling sea defence wall. This requires moving the coast path approximately 10m seaward as indicated by the blue arrows/lines on the photo below. SCC continue to seek the best sustainable outcome for public access.



Pakenham Fen Meadow

Work has been delayed but there is a commitment for SZC to provide a dry path across the site

East Anglia Two Offshore Windfarm

Works to establish the cable corridor from Thorpeness to Friston have started 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 any temporary alternative routes such as the bridleway below, which is also the Sandlings Walk.



END

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	NSIPS in consultation
Paper:	LAF 26/14
Author/Contact:	Samantha Bye
Meeting:	Thursday 23 July 2026, 1:00pm - 3:00pm
Venue:	The Fromus Centre Saxmundham

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**

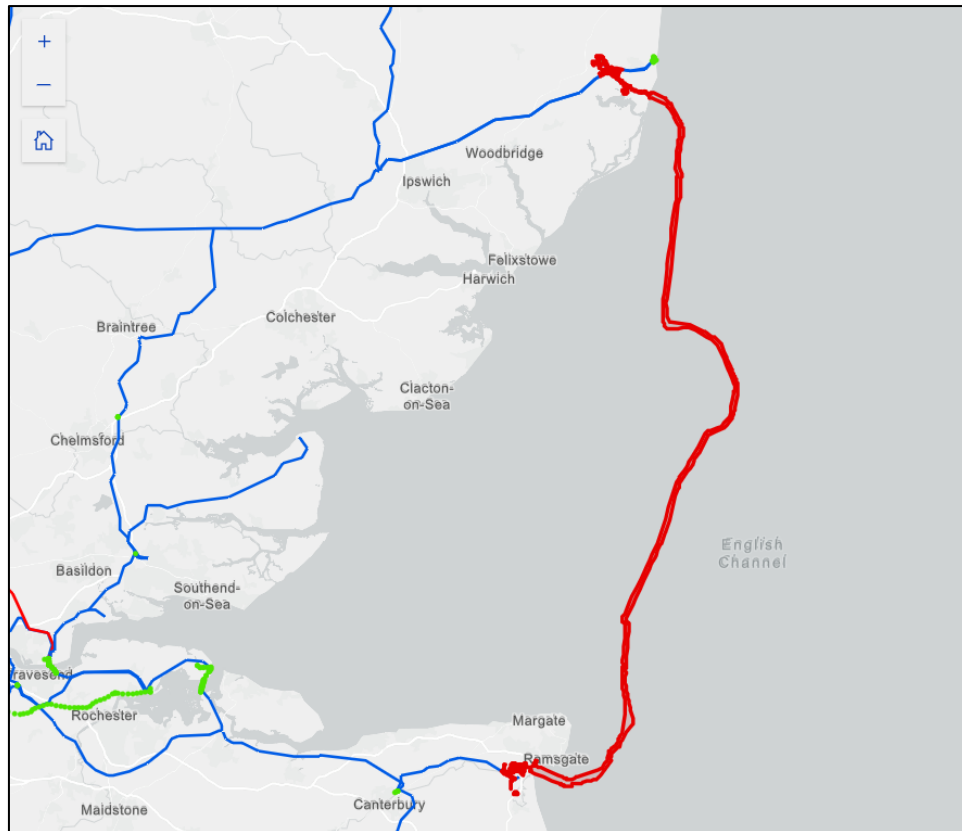
Sealink is a 130km long offshore cable with new onshore infrastructure allowing power to flow in either direction between Suffolk and Kent, depending on where renewable energy is being generated at that time and where in the country power is needed. The scheme's onshore infrastructure includes a converter 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/dc9df77857724873877772709f8a970>



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)

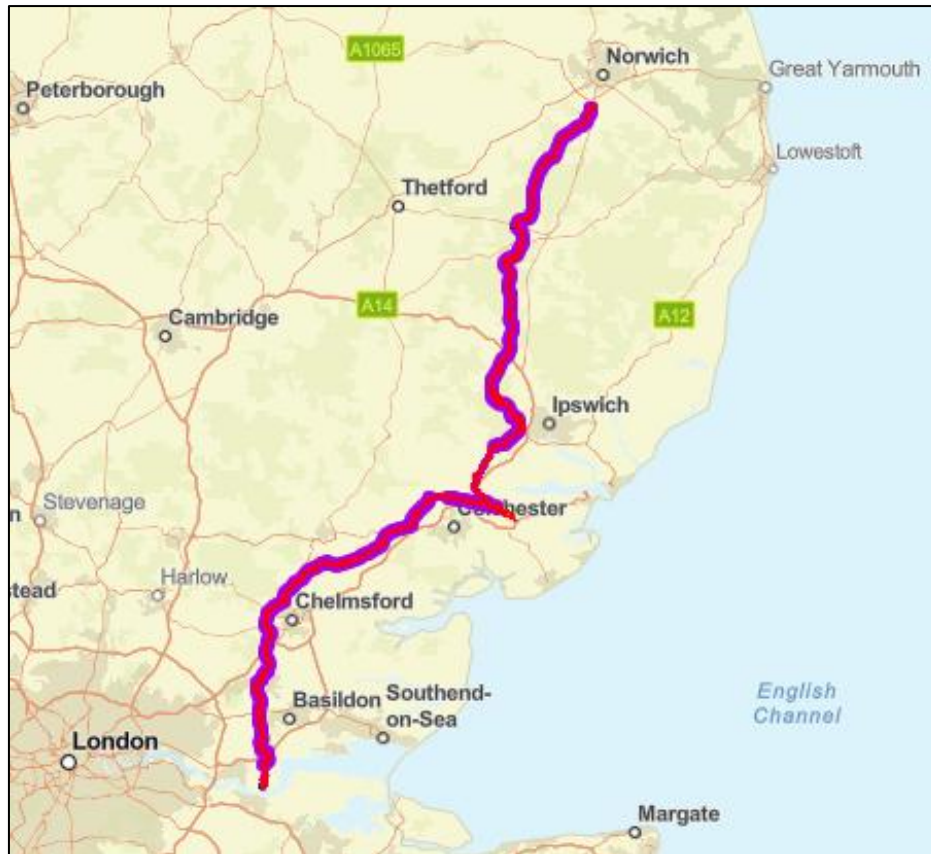
Norwich to Tilbury will reinforce the high voltage power network in East Anglia between existing substations at Norwich Main in Norfolk, Bramford in Suffolk, and Tilbury in Essex, as well as connect new offshore wind generation. The scheme will build approximately 160km of overhead lines and pylons, 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:

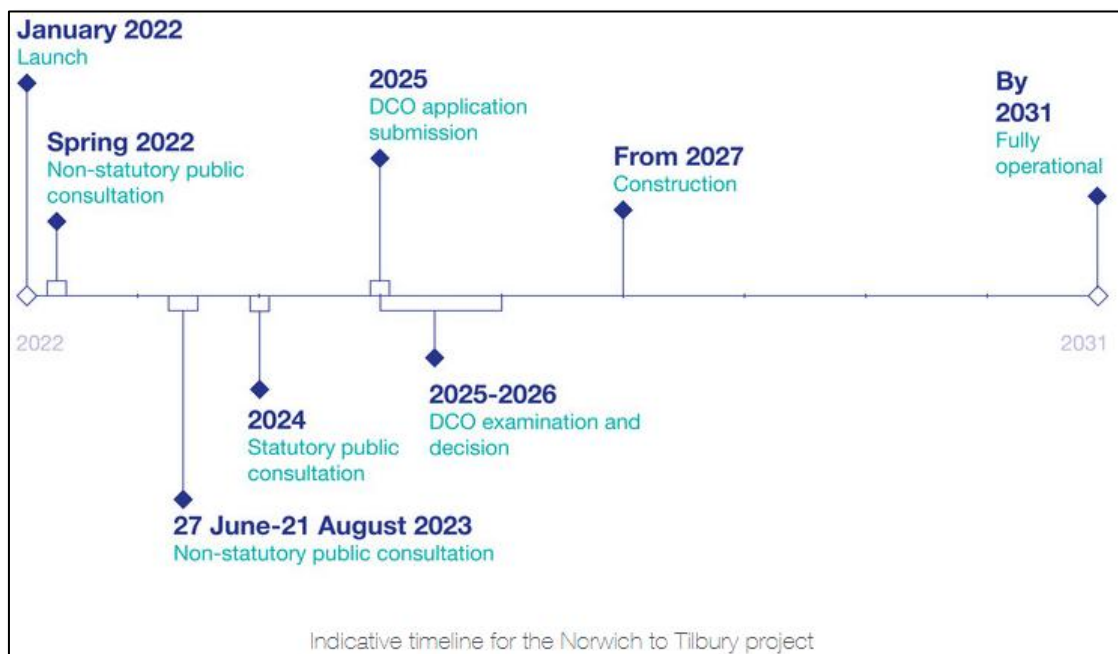
<https://www.nationalgrid.com/electricity-transmission/network-and-infrastructure/infrastructure-projects/norwich-to-tilbury>

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.

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.

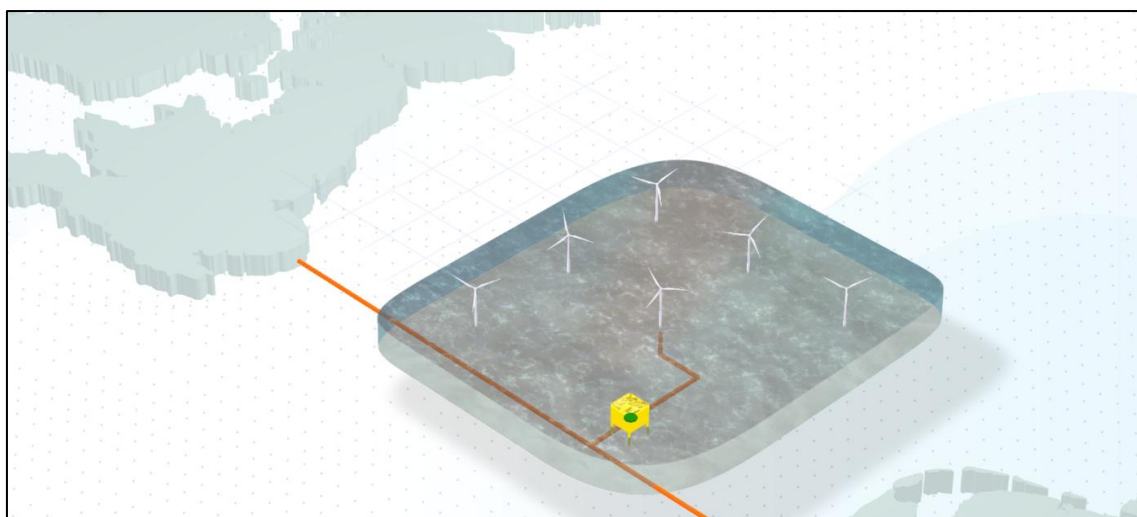
In Suffolk the scheme involves landfall of the subsea cable near Walberswick and the construction of an onshore cable corridor to a new onshore converter station east of Saxmundham. Onshore cabling will then link to an expanded National Grid substation at Friston (approved under the EA1North & 2 DCO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

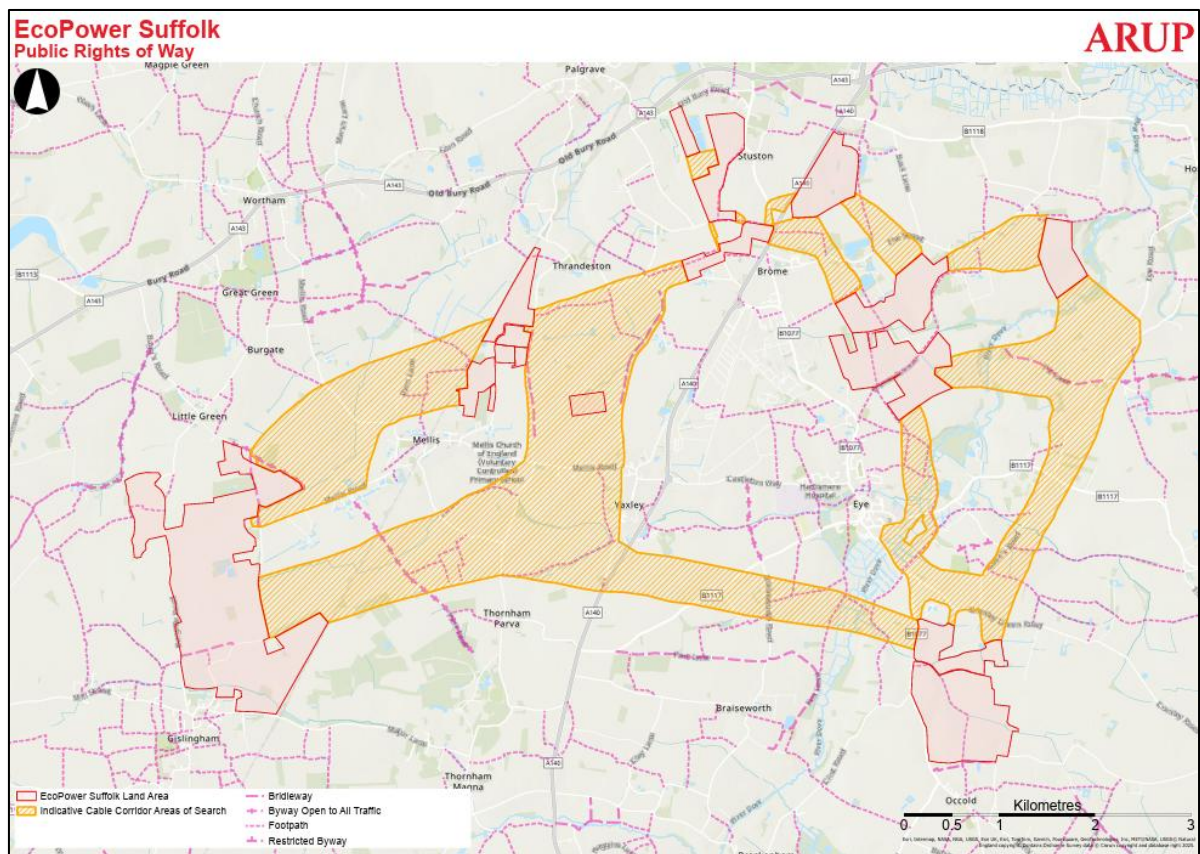
EcoPower Suffolk is a solar farm and a co-located Battery Energy Storage System and associated infrastructure with grid connection via underground cable to the Yaxley substation.

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

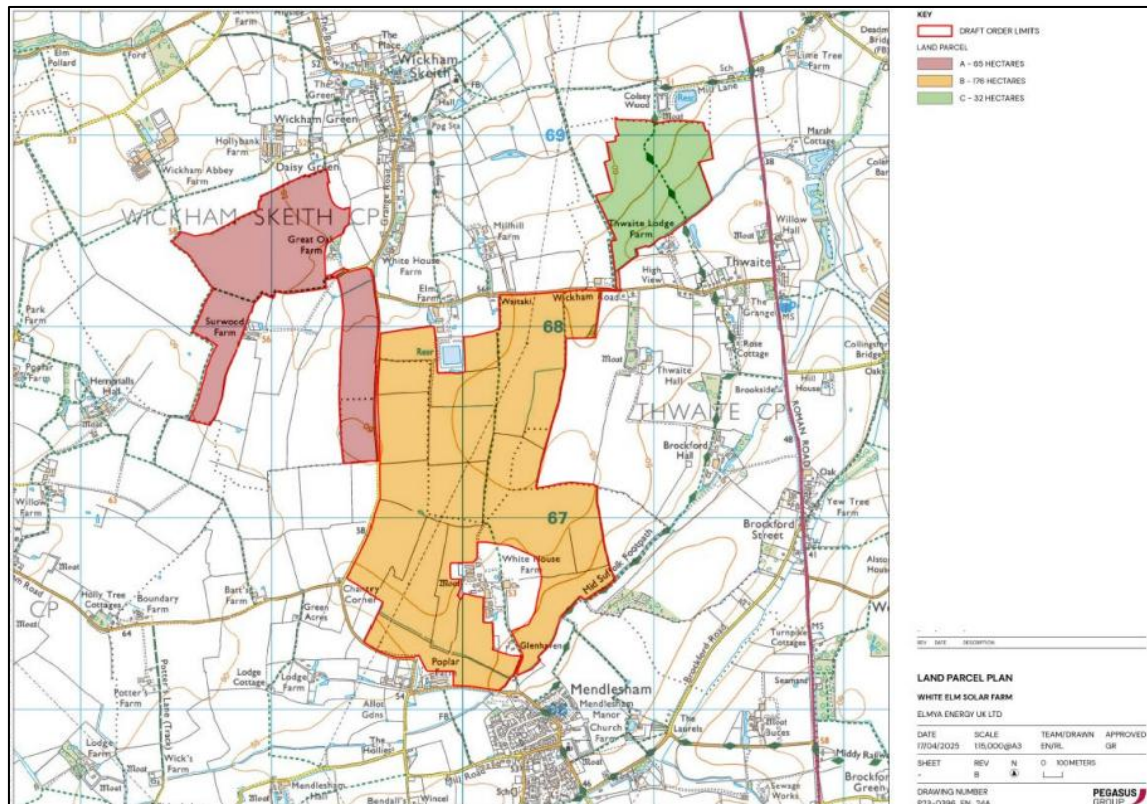
White Elm is a proposed solar farm and battery energy storage system (BESS) on land north of Mendlesham.

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.

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							

KEY:							
Stage Completed							
Stage In Progress							

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	Options For Local Access Forums where the access authority is abolished under local government reorganisation and new access authorities created
Paper:	LAF 26/15
Author/Contact:	Andrew Woodin
Meeting:	Thursday 23 July 2026, 1:00pm - 3:00pm
Venue:	The Fromus Centre Saxmundham

1.Introduction

From 1st April 2028 (Vesting Day), Suffolk County Council will cease to exist, and the council will be replaced by three new unitary councils. Each new council will be an access authority and be responsible for establishing its own local access authority (LAF).

A **shadow authority** (or shadow council), a temporary governing body elected during the transition period of local government reorganisation (LGR) in England, will operate alongside existing county and district councils for approximately 12 months before the new, unified unitary council officially takes over.

The purpose of this paper is to lay out options for establishing either a joint forum or the new councils establishing their own forums.

2. Background

This advice is grounded in the **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW)** and informed by **recent English local government reorganisations**.

The paper separates **what the law requires** from **what good reorganisation practice looks like** and then sets out a **step-by-step process** which could form a **transition plan**.

What the law requires (and what it does not)

Statutory position

- **Section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000** places a duty on each **“appointing authority”** (i.e. each highway authority or National Park authority) to establish a Local Access Forum for its area.
- Once reorganisation takes effect and **new unitary councils become highway/access authorities**, that duty **automatically transfers** to each new authority from vesting day.
- The legislation **does not require**:

- continuity of an existing county-wide LAF;
- automatic splitting of an existing LAF; or
- a one-to-one replacement of the old forum with identical membership.

What this means in practice

- A single county LAF **cannot legally continue** if there is no longer a single appointing authority.
- Each new unitary council must either:
 - create its **own LAF**, or
 - be party to a **joint LAF arrangement** where this is lawful and formally agreed.

3. What guidance and recent reorganisations imply

National LGR guidance suggests:

- Advisory and governance arrangements are expected to be **formally reconstituted during transition**, normally via implementation bodies and shadow arrangements;
- Arrangements must be **clear, legally robust, and in place by vesting day** to avoid gaps in statutory compliance.

However:

- there is **no specific national guidance** on LAFs during LGR;
- therefore, councils must design **locally appropriate but legally defensible solutions**.

This mirrors what happened with:

- Cumbria (two new unitaries),
- North Yorkshire (single unitary),
- Somerset (single unitary), where advisory bodies were expressly reviewed and re-established as part of transition rather than “carried over”.

4. Viable structural options after a county split

There are **three lawful models**, but only two are usually sensible:

Option A – Separate LAFs for each new unitary (default/safest)

Each new unitary:

- Formally disbands the county LAF on vesting day;
- Establishes its own LAF under s.94 CRow;
- Appoints members responding to its own geography, access network and political accountability.

Pros	Cons
Legally simplest	Loss of strategic county-wide view
Clearest accountability	Duplication of effort where networks cross boundaries
Aligns with the statutory duty	

Option B – Joint Local Access Forum (recommended where geography is shared)

Two or more new unitaries:

- Agree a **joint LAF**, established by formal resolutions of each council;
- Set out governance, appointments, cost-sharing and secretariat via a joint committee or protocol;
- Each authority remains an “appointing authority” for CRow purposes but discharges the duty jointly.

Pros	Cons
Preserves strategic coherence	Requires careful legal drafting
Mirrors joint arrangements already common for waste, transport, and minerals	Needs strong officer coordination in early years
Particularly suitable for PRow networks that remain functionally county-wide	

Option C – Informal advisory body (not sufficient alone)

A non-statutory forum advising multiple councils **cannot replace** a statutory LAF and would leave councils non-compliant if relied upon alone.

Recommendation

This is a suggested (practical and defensible) transition process for LGR

Stage 1 – Decision during the shadow period

During the implementation/shadow council stage:

1. **Identify future access authorities** (which new unitaries will be highways authorities).
2. Agree **in principle** whether:
 - each unitary will have its own LAF, or
 - a joint LAF will be established.
3. Record this in the **reorganisation governance workstream** alongside other statutory boards.

(This mirrors the LGR expectation that statutory frameworks are settled before vesting day.) [\[assets.pub...ice.gov.uk\]](#)

Stage 2 – Managing the legacy county LAF

Before vesting day:

1. Formally notify the existing county LAF that:

- it will cease to exist on vesting day when the county council ceases to be the appointing authority.

2. Ask the LAF to:

- produce a **final advisory report**, and
- identify key strategic access issues crossing the new boundaries.

This avoids any implication of informal continuation without legal footing.

Stage 3 – Establishing the new LAF(s)

For each new LAF (or joint LAF):

1. Pass a **formal resolution** establishing the LAF under s.94 CRow.
2. Adopt or refresh:
 - Terms of reference,
 - Appointment criteria,
 - Code of conduct.
3. Re-advertise membership rather than automatically rolling over members, to:
 - Demonstrate fairness,
 - Reflect the new geography,
 - Avoid challenge.

Existing members can of course reapply.

Stage 4 – Cross-boundary working (crucial in practice)

Whether LAFs are separate or joint:

- Explicitly build in:
 - Standing invitations to neighbouring authorities,
 - Shared agenda items where networks cross boundaries,
 - A clear route for escalation of strategic advice to all affected councils.

This aligns with the statutory purpose of LAFs to advise **all relevant authorities exercising access functions**, not just the appointing council.

Key risks to avoid (seen in past reorganisations)

- Allowing a county LAF to continue informally after vesting day.
- Assuming members “transfer” automatically.
- Creating advisory groups without explicit CRow footing.
- Failing to decide arrangements early, leading to a compliance gap.

5. Conclusion

- **LAFs do not automatically survive reorganisation:** they attach to the access authority, not the geography.
- When a county splits, the county LAF **must be wound up**.
- New unitaries must either:
 - establish their own LAFs, or
 - formally establish a **joint LAF**.
- This should be decided and documented **during the shadow period**, not after vesting day.

The county council as appointing authority will consider options for new local access forums and work with the shadow councils to agree a way forward either for a joint LAF or LAFs for each new council. **Advice from SLAF will be very welcome.**

END

Andrew Woodin SCC July 2026

Footnotes:

- i) The three Suffolk unitary authorities are:
 - Western Suffolk Council (current local government areas of West Suffolk, 21 parishes from Mid Suffolk, and Babergh (less 31 parishes)). Population: 269,000.
 - Central and Eastern Suffolk Council (current local government areas of Mid Suffolk (less 29 parishes), and East Suffolk (less 25 parishes). Population: 261,000.
 - Ipswich and South Suffolk Council (current local government areas of Ipswich, 31 parishes from Babergh, 8 parishes from Mid Suffolk, and 25 parishes from East Suffolk). Population: 257,000.
- ii) [Interactive Map of New Councils](#)

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	The King Charles III England Coast Path
Paper:	LAF 26/16
Author/Contact:	Claire Dickson
Meeting:	Thursday 23 July 2026, 1:00pm - 3:00pm
Venue:	The Fromus Centre Saxmundham

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 and Norfolk is shown on their website. The progress report update dates are shown in the links.

Stretch name	Progress
Harwich to Shotley Gate	Stage 5: Approved. (Not yet available for public use – work to establish the route is currently taking place)
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 of 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 under 80% of the whole route is now open. Nationally 45 miles have opened since the previous LAF meeting, all within Suffolk.

Status of proposals	Number of miles
Total mileage submitted to government	2689
- complete and open for public use	2144
- approved by government and work to establish the route taking place, or awaited	476
- awaiting government decision	69

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 06.07.2026

No change since previous report

- Report 1 and 4. Secretary of State announced their approval of this stretch on 31 August 2021
- Report 2, 3, 5 and 6. Secretary of State announced their approval of this stretch on 18 September 2025.
- Stage 5 (Open) – but not yet available for use
- Work to establish the route is now taking place, for opening in Summer 2026

Shotley Gate to Felixstowe Ferry – Giles Merritt. Last updated 06.07.2026

- Open for use.

Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey – Giles Merritt. Last updated 06.07.2026

- Open for use.

Bawdsey to Aldeburgh – Giles Merritt. Last updated 06.07.2026

- Open for use.

Aldeburgh to Hopton-on-Sea – Giles Merritt. Last updated 13.04.26

- 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 has predominantly focused on the establishment works for these final approved stretches over the last year 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, and Bawdsey to Aldeburgh 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.

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 sections covering Manningtree to Shotley Gate and Southwold to Pakefield, all stretches have received approval over the last 10 months. Scoping works have been completed with full Habitat Regulation Assessments carried out and mitigation works identified. The team have liaised closely with Environment Agency over permits and exemptions for planned works. With all 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, Manningtree to Shotley and part of Southwold to Pakefield. Establishment grants have recently been awarded by Natural England. With the works completed on site for Manningtree to Shotley. This stretch is due to open late July 2026.

Works have been scoped for remaining tenders for Southwold to Pakefield. The county council are awaiting resolution by Natural England for a couple of issues prior to 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 both stretches 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 by Autumn 2026.

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 will be 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 twenty-nine 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.

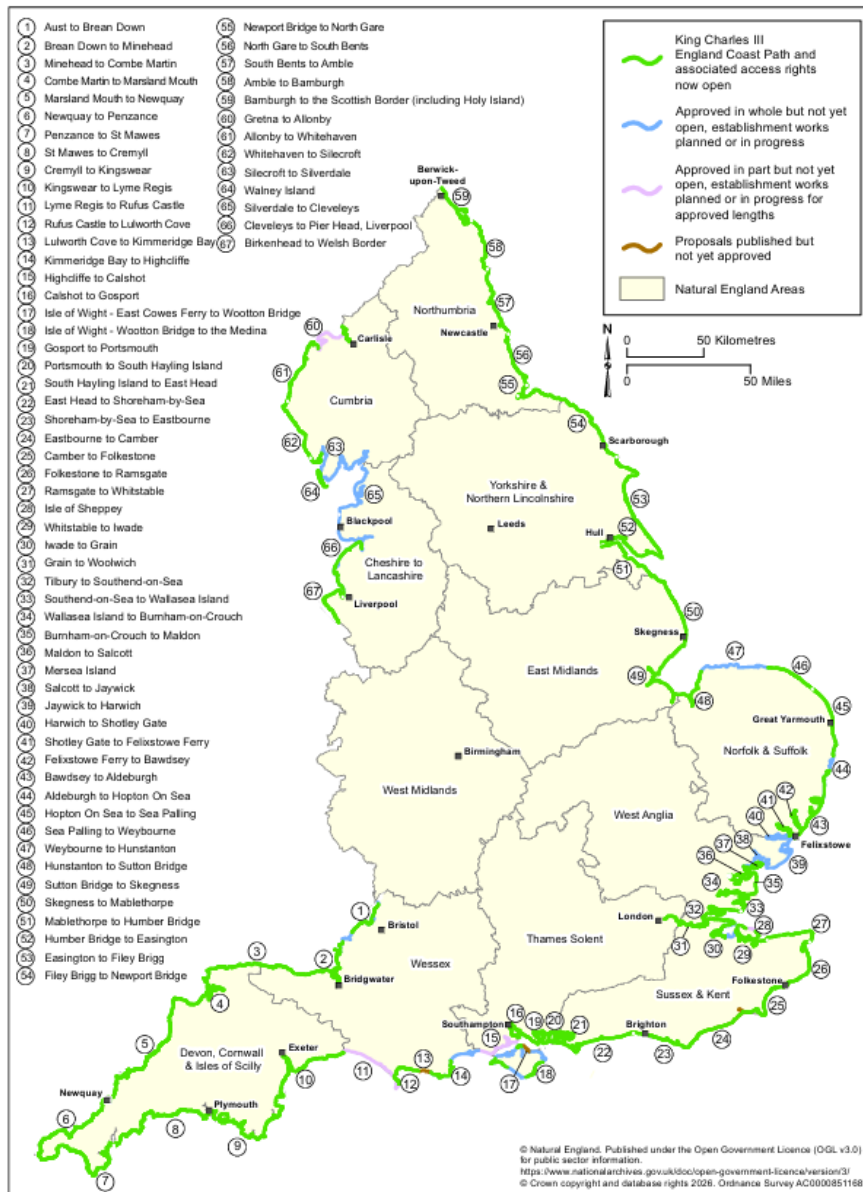
4. Future Management of the England Coast Path in the East of England

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 will commence in post in August 2026; part of their role will be working alongside the Operations Management Team in establishing a National Trail Partnership for the route and launch of the route in Suffolk.

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.



END
CLD/SCC JULY 2026

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	Network Rail and Associated British Port Updates
Paper:	LAF 26/17
Author/Contact:	Steve Kerr / Andrew Woodin
Meeting:	Thursday 23 July 2026, 1:00pm - 3:00pm
Venue:	The Fromus Centre Saxmundham

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. Officers have requested this information from NR on various occasions. The county council is now considering escalating this matter.

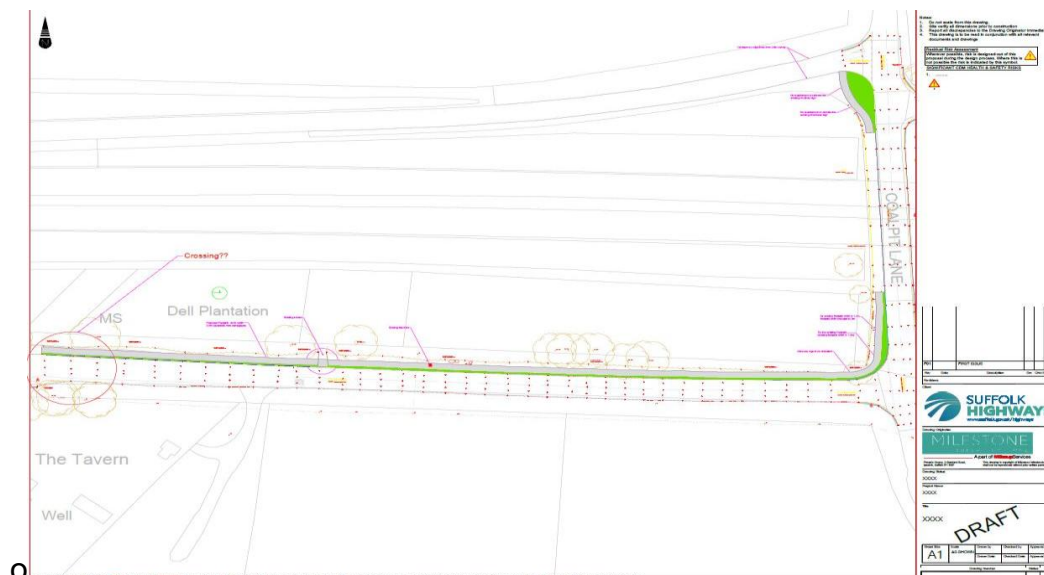
General/Countywide

NR's Suffolk Level Crossing Reduction Strategy - Transport and Works Act Order

Further to the update provided in April, all sites have now been certified by the county council, with the final site (Paynes) having been inspected and certified on 4 June. All sites are subject to a 12-month maintenance period by the railway operator from the date of certification, before the maintenance responsibility is handed over to the county council. This now sees the end of this long-running project, which evidences how working in partnership with NR can deliver successful outcomes.

Higham – Highway Improvement Scheme

Further to the update provided to the Forum at its April meeting, officers are working with Suffolk Highways to programme the construction works. At this point in time, no start date has been agreed.



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

Since the Forum was last updated on this item, Associated British Ports' (ABP) legal representatives have not submitted any formal written request to progress the order package that needs to be brought before the Magistrates Court to stop up those elements of the highway coincident with the railway. Officers have recently requested an update from ABP's solicitors.

Future TWAO application

Since the Forum's last update, the county council has still not received any further detail or update on NR's future TWAO proposals, which is being influenced by funding constraints.

Suffolk Road Rail Partnership /group (SRRPG)

At its last meeting the Forum was advised that the meeting scheduled for Thursday 23 April had been cancelled. The next meeting is to be held on 17 July and officers will provide a verbal update on any important discussion points.

END SK/SCC July 2026