

Cabinet

Report Title:	Suffolk Local Access Forum Annual Report 2024/25
Meeting Date:	4 November 2025
Lead Councillor(s):	Councillor Paul West, Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding
Local Councillor(s):	All councillors
Director:	Andrew Cook, Executive Director of Growth, Highways and Infrastructure
Assistant Director or Head of Service:	Steve Palfrey, Assistant Director, Waste and Environment
Author:	Andrew Woodin, Rights of Way Development and Improvement Manager, Andrew.woodin@suffolk.gov.uk

Brief summary of the item to be considered

- The Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF) is a statutory stakeholder body which advises on improving access to the countryside. It is required to submit an annual report of its activities, and the appointing authority (Suffolk County Council) must publish that report. The report details the Forum's activities and highlights its priorities and recommendations.

Members of The Suffolk Local Access Forum are volunteers with a wide range of skills, knowledge, and experiences in countryside access. In addition, one County Councillor and one District Councillor sit on the Forum.

This is the Forum's twenty second Annual Report, and it summarises their activities between October 2024 to July 2025.

What is Cabinet being asked to decide?

- | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The Cabinet is being asked to accept the Suffolk Local Access Forum Annual Report 2024/25 and the report's recommendations and confirm the actions that the Council is taking in response to those recommendations. |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Reason for recommendation

- Under the Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007, local access Forums are required to submit an annual report to their appointing authority with guidance stating: "We would expect the authority to respond positively to the Forum's annual report and to say what actions they have taken on the advice and recommendations of the Forum."

What are the key issues to consider?

4. The key issues are as follows:

a) Suffolk's Energy Schemes:

Whilst supporting green and renewable energy generation, the Forum maintains its position this should not be at the expense of protecting and improving public rights of way (PRoW) and other green access, eg open access and other informal access used by the public. Schemes of particular interest or concern are:

- Sea Link: the Forum is pressing for PRoW improvements to improve connectivity for off-road walking and cycling. This includes ensuring the haulage road from the B1121 remains a legacy for sustainable movements between the PRoW network around the SeaLink site and the planned Saxmundham Garden Village development of housing and commercial to the west of the B1121.
- LionLink: concerns remain for SLAF over the cable landing point, above ground infrastructure, and works impacting on green access, plus the coordination of proposals alongside other NSIPs, most notably Sea Link.
- Solar Farms: these remain a serious issue with their cumulative large-scale coverage on the landscape having a significant impact on people's enjoyment and access to the countryside.
- The Forum is particularly concerned that public rights of way and other green access is not covered as a separate public service within individual NSIPs, but spread through different work areas like landscape, transport and health. This can dilute the value of green access and increases officer's workload, on top of course of dealing with multiple NSIPs and other large developments, and the impact of so many schemes in an area and the pressure on officer resources in coordinating responses. The Forum will follow progress on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill with interest.
- Other very large development: Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood: there is a need to see a coordinated and planned development to ensure walking, wheeling, and cycling are of the highest standard encouraging residents to move easily and freely to and from the site and into Felixstowe and the Trimleys.
- Sizewell C: the Forum very much approves the appointment of a project manager to utilise the PRoW Fund to improve the green access network as a legacy for Sizewell C. The Forum received a briefing from the manager, including the major project to create a walking, wheeling and cycling link northwards from Aldeburgh to Minsmere and beyond.

The Forum asks Cabinet to be mindful of the impact of NSIPs and other large developments on the PRoW and green access network.

Response: The Council recognises concerns over the numerous projects and the key role Suffolk plays nationally and will work to ensure appropriate mitigation for PRoW and other green access is integral to all proposals. The

Council welcomes and will consider the Forum's comments on NSIPs and large developments.

b) Improving Suffolk's Access Network:

The Forum welcomes the Council's continued determination to improving and promoting walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure. The Forum has noted the Rights of Way & Access team's success in bidding for external funds through, for example, s.106 contributions, district council's community infrastructure levies, active travel funding and the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

Response: The Council will endeavour to continue to deliver access improvement projects in line with the Suffolk Green Access Strategy 2020-2030, recognising the value they create.

c) Severance of Suffolk's PRow Network:

The Forum welcomes the completion of the Needham Market Gipsy Lane public footpath diversion through the reconstructed railway culvert in March 2025, allowing the closure of the level crossing. The Forum praises the perseverance of Council officers in working with both Network Rail and landowners.

The Forum received a briefing from Network Rail staff on a new Transport & Works Act Order (TWAo), to close up to 18 PRow level crossings. The Forum will scrutinise progress of the proposal and encourages the Council to ensure both suitable and convenient alternative routes are provided where PRow are closed and its reasonable officer costs are reimbursed from an early stage. The Forum hopes the county council will object to unacceptable proposals, as it did successfully in the 2017 Network Rail TWAo.

Response: The Council thanks the Forum for its support in protecting access when PRow are threatened with severance. The Council supports improved access networks which relate to road and rail schemes and will endeavour to always consult the Forum.

d) The King Charles III England Coast Path

Whilst noting the slow progress by the office of the Secretary of State in approving stretches of the coast path in Suffolk, the Forum endorses the Council with Natural England's successful opening of two stretches of the trail in Suffolk. Shotley Gate to Felixstowe stretch was officially opened in October 2024, followed by Aldeburgh to Hopton in December 2024.

Response: the Council is also pleased to see progress on opening stretches of the coast path and thanks the Forum for its contribution.

e) Definitive Map Consolidation

The Forum was pleased to hear the progress being made to update the definitive map and statement for Suffolk, and the inclusion of past orders and other legal events. These changes have been included in an up to date mapping database and are being published to the web, with completion expected by the end of the summer. The definitive map will then be subject to a rolling consolidation programme.

Response: the Council is pleased to note this legal consolidation project has now been concluded.

How does this relate to the County Council objectives?

5. This report is linked to the Council’s objectives indicated below:

Promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk	☒
Strengthening our local economy	☒
Protecting and enhancing our environment (including carbon reduction)	☒
Providing value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer	☒

How will this impact on the Council’s objectives?

6. The Forum’s recommendations and comments strongly support the delivery of the Council’s objectives, through its advice on protecting and improving the green access network. Developing the access infrastructure encourages healthy, sustainable travel choices, and are also relevant to reducing carbon emissions and Suffolk achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. The Forum provides value for money as its running costs are low and members are volunteers.

What are the resource and risk implications?

7. The Suffolk Local Access Forum understands pressures on public finances but highlights the importance of green access on people’s physical health and mental wellbeing, its importance to the rural economy, and asks the Council to continue its on-going support in this area. The report and the council’s response to it do not directly add any resource pressures or risks.
8. The Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of Growth Highways and Infrastructure will consider and discuss with the Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding the appropriate level of funding for the public rights of way and green access network when looking at the priorities for revenue and capital budgets.
9. Following a pre-screening, it has been confirmed a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required for the SLAF Annual Report 2024-2025.

What are the timescales associated with this decision?

10. The Council is required to receive this annual report and indicate how it responds to the recommendations in it but there is no set timescale for doing so.

Alternative options

11. Cabinet could change the proposed responses from the Council to the recommendations from SLAF or suggest additional issues that it would like the Forum to explore.

Who will be affected by this decision?

12. Officers acting on these recommendations and users of public rights of way, communities, land managers and developers within Suffolk.

Main body of report

Suffolk Local Access Forum Report 2024-25

a) **Suffolk's Energy Schemes:**

Whilst supporting green and renewable energy generation, the Forum maintains its position this should not be at the expense of protecting and improving public rights of way (PRoW) and other green access, eg open access and other informal access used by the public. Schemes of particular interest or concern are:

- **Sea Link:** the Forum is pressing for PRoW improvements to improve connectivity for off-road walking and cycling. This includes eastwards from Saxmundham towards Leiston, and ensuring the haulage road from the B1121 remains a legacy for sustainable movements between the PRoW network around the SeaLink site and the planned Saxmundham Garden Village development of housing and commercial to the west of the B1121.
- **LionLink:** concerns remain over the cable landing point, above ground infrastructure, and works impacting on green access, plus the coordination of proposals alongside other NSIPs, most notably Sea Link.
- **Solar Farms:** these remain a serious issue with their cumulative large-scale coverage on the landscape having a significant impact on people's enjoyment and access to the countryside.
- The Forum is particularly concerned that public rights of way and other green access is not covered as a separate public service within individual NSIPs, but spread through different work areas like landscape, transport and health. This can dilute the value of green access and increases officer's workload, on top of course of dealing with multiple NSIPs and other large developments, and the impact of so many schemes in an area and the pressure on officer resources in coordinating responses. The Forum will follow progress on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill with interest.
- **Other very large development: Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood:** there is a need to see a coordinated and planned development to ensure walking, wheeling, and cycling are of the highest standard encouraging residents to move easily and freely to and from the site and into Felixstowe and the Trimleys. The Forum is pleased with recent s106 improvements within The Grove with a new boardwalk and bridge making access easier for all.
- **Sizewell C:** the Forum very much approves the appointment of a project manager to utilise the PRoW Fund to improve the green access network as a legacy for Sizewell C. The Forum received a briefing from the manager, including the major project to create a walking, wheeling and cycling link northwards from Aldeburgh to Minsmere and beyond. The Forum notes the project enjoys the full support of SZC Co. Delivering the PRoW Fund schemes will be challenging and the Forum looks forward to working with the Council on this.

The Forum further notes the good progress by the Council's SZC funded PRoW specialist in protecting access impacted by SZC and its associated developments.

The Forum asks Cabinet to be mindful of the impact of NSIPs and other large developments on the PRow and green access network.

b) Improving Suffolk's Access Network:

The Forum welcomes the Council's continued determination to improving and promoting walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure. The Forum has noted the Rights of Way and Access team's success in bidding for external funds through, for example, district council's community infrastructure levies, active travel funding and the Rural England Prosperity Fund, which secured £250,000 for improving public access to rivers and sustainable access to schools.

c) Severance of Suffolk's PRow Network:

The Forum welcomes the completion of the Needham Market Gipsy Lane public footpath diversion through the reconstructed railway culvert in March 2025, allowing the closure of the level crossing. The Forum praises the perseverance of county council officers in working with both Network Rail and landowners.

The Forum received a briefing from Network Rail staff on a new Transport & Works Act Order (TWAO), to close up to 18 PRow level crossings. The Forum will scrutinise progress of the proposal and encourages the county council to ensure both suitable and convenient alternative routes are provided where PRow are closed and its reasonable officer costs are reimbursed from an early stage. The Forum hopes the county council will object to unacceptable proposals, as it did successfully in the 2017 Network Rail TWAO.

The Forum has been involved in and welcomes the Rights of Way & Access team's involvement in the A12 major road network improvement project and hopes to see improved PRow crossing and walking, wheeling and cycling accessibility.

d) The King Charles III England Coast Path

Whilst noting the slow progress by the office of the Secretary of State in approving stretches of the coast path in Suffolk, the Forum endorses the Council with Natural England's successful opening of two stretches of the trail in Suffolk. Shotley Gate to Felixstowe stretch was officially opened in October 2024, followed by Aldeburgh to Hopton in December 2024. The Forum notes the team are currently working towards the establishment of the stretch between Felixstowe Ferry and Bawdsey, with an anticipated opening in September 2025. Works are due to commence on the remaining confirmed stretch between Bawdsey and Felixstowe Ferry in late summer 2025. The Forum awaits approval of the remaining stretches by the office of the Secretary of State and thanks officers for the completed construction work required as the final part of the establishment process.

e) Definitive Map Consolidation

The Forum was pleased to hear the progress being made to update the definitive map and statement for Suffolk, and the inclusion of past orders and other legal events. These changes have been included in an up to date mapping database and are being published to the web, with completion expected by the end of the summer. The definitive map will then be subject to a rolling consolidation programme.

Administration and Meetings

13. The Council's Rights of Way and Access team provides secretariat services and recruits new members but the Forum have their own logo, letter heading, email address and website page at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-Forum>.
14. The cost of administering the Forum in 2024-25 was £855.50.
15. The Forum met on 24 October 2024, 23 January 2025, 24 April 2025, and 24 July 2025. All meetings were open to the public.
16. At meetings the Forum received updates and briefings including:
 - a) Suffolk energy schemes,
 - b) Network Rail level crossing closures, including a presentation on their proposed new multi crossing TWAO,
 - c) King Charles III England Coast Path,
 - d) Suffolk's local cycling and walking infrastructure plan,
 - e) Suffolk's local transport plan update – presentation by Lewis Boudville Suffolk County Council,
 - f) East Suffolk Council Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood update – presentation by James Goldberg East Suffolk Council,
 - g) A12 Major Road improvements,
 - h) East of England regional access Forum,
 - i) SLAF membership terms review,
 - j) East Suffolk's cycling, walking and wheeling working group,
 - k) Sizewell C,
 - l) Site visits have been arranged to see issues on the ground at:
 - i) New public access, Melton - King Charles III England Coast Path
 - ii) Gypsy Lane level crossing, Needham Market.
17. The Forum thanks the Rights of Way and Access team for their on-going support, advice and assistance which is vital to the Forum performing their duties.

SLAF Membership

18. The Forum had 14 members during the period covered by this report.

Working Groups:

19. The Forum has the following working groups:

Topic	Membership
PRoW Severance, including Network Rail and National Highways	Barry Hall, Clare Philips, Roley Wilson, Chris Bower
Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)	Suzanne Bartlett, Barry Hall, Roley Wilson, Anthony Wright, Gordon Merfield
England Coast Path	Barry Hall, Susan Mobbs, Roley Wilson, Chris Bower
Planning and Development	Roley Wilson, Monica Pipe, Anthony Wright, Margaret Hancock, Chris Bower

Barry Hall

Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

Christopher Bower

Vice Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

August 2025

Sources of further information

a) Local Access Forums:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-access-Forums-participate-in-decisions-on-public-access>

b) Suffolk Local Access Forum web pages and membership

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-Forum>

c) Suffolk Local Access Forum meeting 24 October 2024

[2024-10-24-SLAF-Agenda-and-papers-website](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-Forum/2024-10-24-SLAF-Agenda-and-papers-website)

d) Suffolk Local Access Forum meeting 23 January 2025

[2025-01-23- SLAF Agenda and Papers - website](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-Forum/2025-01-23-SLAF-Agenda-and-Papers-website)

e) Suffolk Local Access Forum meeting 24 April 2025

[2025-04-24 - SLAF Agenda and papers - website](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-Forum/2025-04-24-SLAF-Agenda-and-papers-website)

f) Suffolk Local Access Forum meeting 24 July 2025

[2025_07_24 SLAF Agenda and Papers Published](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-Forum/2025-07-24-SLAF-Agenda-and-Papers-Published)

g) The Suffolk Green Access Strategy: Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/green-access-strategy>

Suffolk Local Access Forum – Members Details

SLAF Membership August 2024 – July 2025

The Forum had 14 members during the period covered by this report.

Barry Hall (Chair) – Barry is a retired local government officer with experience of working on countryside and rights of way projects. Barry retains an interest in countryside access as a member of the RSPB, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and National Trust. *Barry has been a member of SLAF since October 2007 and Chair since January 2016.*

Christopher Bower (Vice Chair – January 2024 onwards) – Chris is a keen cyclist who enjoys off-road hiking, biking, and running, exploring the natural environment, and participating in ultradistance cycling events. As a Cycling UK advocate, he has created a long-distance multi-terrain cycling route around Suffolk to encourage responsible green access and improve physical, mental, and environmental health. *Chris became a member of SLAF in April 2023 and took on the role of Vice Chair in January 2024.*

Suzanne Bartlett – Having been brought up on a farm near Framlingham, Suzanne spent most of her life living and working in Suffolk. Since retiring as a librarian, she has dedicated more time to walking and cycling in the countryside, whilst continuing as a self-employed writer and researcher. She is particularly concerned with promoting the benefits of outdoor activities for both physical health and mental well-being. *Suzanne has been a member of SLAF since October 2018.*

Margaret Hancock – Margaret is a Blue Badge Tourist Guide with a particular interest in promoting sustainable tourism. She is keen to encourage visitors to explore Suffolk by public transport, walking and cycling to benefit the local economy and preserve the peace and tranquillity of the county. Margaret has experience of supporting children and young people with disabilities, enabling them to access leisure facilities. *Margaret has been a member of SLAF since April 2010.*

Gordon Merfield – With a background in agriculture, since the 1980's Gordon has been active in participating and coaching field sports events as well as being interested in the wider countryside and walking in foreign countries. *Gordon has been a member of SLAF since September 2004.*

Susan Mobbs – Susan is a walker and a cyclist mainly because of the opportunities they give her for exploring landscape, history, and nature at close hand. She is a volunteer with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, doing practical work on local reserves, and a member of the Long-Distance Walkers Association. Her professional background is in social care and social and community development, and she is keen to see improved

access to the countryside and outdoor activities for people of all ages and abilities. *Susan has been a member of SLAF since October 2018.*

Clare Phillips – With a background in journalism, Clare has worked on the BBC's 'Farming Today' programme and presented countryside documentaries for BBC Radio Suffolk. Clare enjoys off-road running and walking in the Suffolk countryside, organises several Trail Races, and runs each year for her running club. She is a horse-rider and a Trustee of Ipswich Riding for the Disabled Group with experience of working with a wide range of riders with disabilities. Clare also chairs the footpaths sub-committee of Brantham Parish Council. *Clare has been a member of SLAF since October 2018.*

Monica Pipe – Monica farms just north of Ipswich and has many well-used footpaths on her land including the promoted long-distance trail, the Fynn Valley Walk. *Monica has been a member of SLAF since its inception in July 2003.*

Adrian Shepherd – Adrian is General Manager of National Trust Ickworth Estate. The Trust was founded on the principle of maintaining spaces for people to enjoy and benefit from, and this is what motivates Adrian in his work. In his professional capacity he is committed to making the estate more accessible to cyclists, walkers, and horse riders, and developing sustainable travel options to National Trust properties. Away from work, Adrian is a walking enthusiast. *Adrian has been a member of SLAF since April 2023.*

Councillor Joanna Spicer – Joanna has lived in Suffolk for over 50 years having come to live here in 1972 to work for the newly formed East Anglia Tourist Board as the Information Officer. She was first elected to Suffolk County Council in 1989 and represents the 16 rural villages of the Blackbourn Division, north-east of Bury St Edmunds. Joanna is not only a keen walker, but also works with parish councils and landowners to press for additional rights of way and green space to be a larger part of new developments. *Joanna has been a member of SLAF since June 2022 representing Suffolk County Council.*

Councillor Edward Thompson – Edward is the Liberal Democrat District Councillor for Martlesham and Purdis Farm. *Edward joined SLAF in July 2024, replacing Cllr Whitelock in representing District and Borough County Council's interests.*

Jim Wayman – Jim works for a company representing east Suffolk potato farmers. He has an interest in balancing the needs of landowners and farmers with maintaining the natural beauty of Suffolk's landscapes and ensuring there is access for all to enjoy the countryside for recreation. *Jim has been a member of SLAF since April 2023.*

Roley Wilson – Roley is actively involved in the promotion of the health benefits of walking for all. He has a lifelong interest in nature and open-air pursuits. During a 33-year career in the police one of his many postings involved being the Wildlife Liaison Officer for Suffolk. He is a member of the Ramblers and since retirement has spent an increasing amount of time in volunteer activities for that organisation. A keen bird

watcher and member of the RSPB and Suffolk Wildlife Trust he has a passion for ensuring that everyone has free and responsible access to the countryside. *Roley has been a member of SLAF since October 2013.*

Anthony Wright – A long-term cyclist and walker, Anthony has worked with several local authorities and publishers on the production of cycling and walking guides. For 15 years before retiring Anthony worked part-time for the national sustainable transport charity Sustrans as its Area Manager for Norfolk and Suffolk, while also working part-time as a Suffolk County Council Cycling Officer. He maintains an active interest in developing cycle routes and advises the Highways Agency and Norfolk & Suffolk Highways of their responsibilities for non-motorist users' safety on the highway. *Anthony has been a member of SLAF since its inception in July 2003.*

This page is intentionally blank.