



Working with Utility Companies Quick Guide

Our commitment to working collaboratively with utility companies to ensure Suffolk's highway network remains safe at all times

What we do

Network Assurance is part of Suffolk Highways which sits within Suffolk County Council as the Highway Authority. Network Assurance operates independently, providing an impartial function within the organisation.

Network Assurance works to:

- Inspect a sample of roadworks and street works to check they are safe, compliant, and completed to the required standard.
- Coordinate works with utility companies, contractors, and other organisations to help minimise disruption.
- Support safe and well-coordinated works on key routes and in sensitive locations, including roads near schools, hospitals, town centres, bus routes, and major junctions.
- Monitor reinstatement quality so roads and footways are left in a suitable condition after works.
- Take appropriate action where works are poorly planned, unsafe, or do not comply with permit requirements.



Working with utility companies

All utility companies and works promoters are required to apply through the Suffolk Permit Scheme before undertaking any activities on the highway. This process helps ensure a regulated, fair, and coordinated approach to highway works, minimising disruption to road users and the local community.

Under the Traffic Management Act 2004, Suffolk County Council must treat all promoters equally, including works undertaken by Suffolk Highways.

As the Highway Authority for Suffolk, we work closely with utility companies that provide essential services, including water, gas, electricity, and telecommunications. Regular coordination meetings are held to review performance, address issues, and promote best practice to support the effective management of works on the highway network.



Reinstating roads, footways and verges

Utility companies must reinstate roads, footways, and verges where they have undertaken works in accordance with the Department for Transport's Specification for the Reinstatement of Openings in Highways (SROH). The SROH sets minimum standards for materials, workmanship, and performance for both interim and permanent reinstatements.

Interim reinstatements may be completed using asphalt and can remain in place for up to six months. Permanent reinstatements should be carried out using materials that match those originally excavated. Therefore, asphalt surfaces will be reinstated with asphalt, while paved areas will be reinstated with slabs that are consistent with the surrounding materials. Utility companies are required to comply with the SROH but are not obligated to exceed these requirements or reinstate areas beyond the extent of the excavation.

Grassed mowed areas must be reinstated using original turf they have dug, or equivalent seed, with reasonable growth established within 12 months.

Utility companies are responsible for repairing any damage they may have caused by undertaking their works (within the scope of the SROH), including grass verges and surrounding areas, and for maintaining their covers, frames, and chambers. If damage creates a safety risk, Suffolk Highways may make the area safe and inform the responsible utility company.

What is not required of utilities

Damage to the highway or verges where utilities have not excavated

Utility companies are only required by legislation to reinstate the areas they have excavated. For example, if damage occurs to a verge on the opposite side of the road as a result of vehicles parking on or overrunning it during the works, this damage would not normally be attributable to the utility undertaking the excavation. Any such damage would instead be assessed and managed in accordance with the [Highway Maintenance Operational Policy \(HMOP\)](#).

Drivers not following the signed diversion route or ‘rat-running’

When a road is closed to facilitate works, an official signed diversion route is normally put in place to support the closure. This diversion route forms part of the approved traffic management arrangements for the works. Unfortunately, there is no legislative requirement for utility companies to carry out remedial works to verges or other highway assets that may be damaged by drivers choosing not to follow the official signed diversion route and instead using alternative routes, a practice commonly referred to as “rat-running”.

Any resulting damage will be assessed in accordance with our [Highway Maintenance Operational Policy \(HMOP\)](#) through the routine highway inspection regime for the relevant road.

However, if the damage poses an immediate danger to public safety - call **0345 606 617**.

Utility workmanship guarantees

Utility company reinstatements are subject to a guarantee period of 2 years, or 3 years for excavations deeper than 1.5 metres, in accordance with the Specification for the Reinstatement of Openings in Highways (SROH).

During this period, the utility company remains responsible for the reinstatement and must rectify any defects that arise to ensure it continues to meet the required standards. Network Assurance undertakes sample inspections under the inspection regime at various stages, including during the works, within six months of completion, and towards the end of the guarantee period. Where a reinstatement does not meet the required standards, the utility company is required to undertake remedial works.

Once the guarantee period expires, responsibility for maintaining the highway returns to Suffolk Highways as the Highway Authority. If Suffolk Highways permanently resurfaces or reconstructs the affected area before the guarantee period ends, the guarantee ceases on completion of those works.



Do I need a permit or road space booking?

Who	Permit required?	3rd Party Road space booking required?
Utility companies	Yes	No
Suffolk County Council works	Yes (shadow charging)	No
Developers (e.g. S278 works)	No	Yes
Events, Skips, Scaffolding, etc.	No (licence required)	Yes

Permit breaches and charges

- £1,000 sanction for working without a permit (£600 if paid early)
- £240 sanction for breach of permit conditions (£120 if paid early)
- Daily overrun charges may apply if works exceed the agreed permit duration (including signs being left on site post the agreed duration, etc). Charges vary by road type and work category, and may total thousands of pounds

Categories of work

The following categories and lead-in times apply to both permit applications submitted through the Street Manager system and road space booking requests made to Network Assurance.

These notice periods ensure that works can be properly coordinated to minimise disruption and manage traffic impact.

Work Type	Examples	Notice Period
Emergency	Burst water main, gas leak	Within 2 hours of starting
Urgent	Unplanned interruptions, service loss and potholes	As soon as possible
Minor	3 or less days duration	At least 3 working days
Standard	4 to 10 days duration	At least 10 working days
Major	over 10 days duration or a temporary regulation order is required (e.g. road closure)	3 months before, permit 10 days before



Emergency works

Utility companies can begin emergency work straight away when there is an urgent problem, such as a gas leak, burst water pipe, or loss of supply. They must inform Network Assurance within two hours of starting work.

A permit is still required, but it cannot be refused in an emergency. However, the permit can be reviewed afterwards to check whether the work was genuinely an emergency. This means companies are not breaking the legislation by starting work before a permit is issued, while still allowing the emergency status to be questioned if necessary.

Officers may also allow extra time for permanent repairs or full replacement of equipment instead of temporary fixes, helping to reduce future disruption.

Unmanned sites

Sites may appear unmanned for several reasons, including:

- Handover between specialist teams (e.g. excavators, engineers, reinstatement teams)
- Allowing reinstatement materials (e.g. concrete, hot materials) to cure
- Safety procedures such as venting gas from excavations during emergency works
- Awaiting traffic management or equipment delivery
- Testing drinking water to make sure it is safe to drink. If on-site test results are unclear, no further work can continue until further the results are received

Section 58 restrictions

Where Suffolk Highways has recently carried out substantial resurfacing or reconstruction, we may impose a Section 58 restriction to prevent new works from taking place for up to two years. Emergency repairs and new customer connections are exempt from this restriction.

Safety at Street Works

All works on the highway must comply with:

[Safety at Street Works and Road Works: A Code of Practice \(DfT\)](#),

[Traffic Signs Manual \(Chapter 8\) for traffic and pedestrian safety management](#)

Fibre, broadband and mobile operators

While Network Assurance coordinates works through permitting, we do not have powers over the siting of cabinets, poles or masts.

Most telecoms operators are "Code Operators" under the Communications Act 2003. Installations fall under permitted development rights in most cases.

Planning authorities (not Suffolk Highways) are responsible for reviewing siting decisions.

Trunk roads maintained by National Highways

A trunk road is a major road designated by [National Highways](#) as a route of strategic importance.

The following roads in Suffolk are maintained by National Highways:

- A11 from Newmarket to Thetford and Norwich
- A47 (North) from Lowestoft (River Waveney/Bascule lifting bridge) to Great Yarmouth
- A12 (South) from Ipswich to Colchester and London
- A14 from the Midlands to Felixstowe

If you have a query about a trunk road, contact the National Highways Information Line on 0300 123 5000, which is open 24 hours a day. To find out more, visit the [National Highways website](#).

Working together

Suffolk County Council / Suffolk Highways values collaborative working with all statutory undertakers.

Through regular communication, shared planning tools, and consistent inspection regimes, we aim to protect Suffolk's road network and ensure high-quality, safe, and efficient reinstatements for our communities.

For more information

For current and planned roadworks, scheduled road closures and diversions routes in the county, visit [one.network](#)