

A Report for Little Cornard Parish Council Meeting on 17th September 2024 From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley

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➤ **Suffolk residents will be able to access electric vehicles on a short-term basis, from next summer**

A trial of electric community vehicles is set to launch next summer in Suffolk, with the tender process beginning this autumn. Plug In Suffolk Car Clubs will be placing sixteen electric vehicles across eight locations in Suffolk which local residents can book by the minute, hour or day. Planned locations include Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket, Sudbury, Needham Market, Stowmarket, Lowestoft and Woodbridge.

Members of the public interested in this project are urged to sign up to the mailing list to receive updates as the project progresses – search: *Plug in Suffolk Car Clubs - Mailing List*.

Car Clubs have already offered people in other parts of the UK access to local, low-emission vehicles without the expense of owning one. Local communities in these areas have already experienced many benefits including improved air quality, reduced congestion and increased mobility for those without access to their own car.

Current providers remain reluctant to fully fund electric community vehicles in rural and semi-rural areas like Suffolk as they do not yet have the real-world data to support the usage.

The project is funded by Suffolk's public sector organisations, helping deliver on two of the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan's goals; a reduced number of cars on the road and an increased proportion of vehicles on the road that are low or zero emission. Additional charge point funding is being provided by the Department for Transport's On Street Residential ChargePoint Scheme (ORCS).

Councillor Neil MacDonald, Chair, Suffolk Public Sector Leaders, says:

"Suffolk residents have been asking about the possibility of bringing Car Clubs to Suffolk following the recent success of the Car Club trial in Oxfordshire, therefore I am looking forward to the launch of our trial.

I am hoping that many individuals and families will benefit from the scheme and help to bring electric community vehicles permanently to our county."

Collaborative Mobility UK (CoMoUK) reported:

'We estimate that, in 2022, each car club vehicle in the UK replaced around 22 private cars.' (CoMoUK Annual Car Club report 2022)

➤ **Small improvements still needed as children's services' Ofsted report published**

Ofsted has published its report into Suffolk County Council's children's services. The report rated the service as 'requires improvement to be good'.

The ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) report conveys a mixed picture across Suffolk. *Importantly, inspectors concluded that children's safeguarding is strong and that the experiences and progress of children in care were good. They also reported that 'children in care thrive'.*

However, they highlighted weakness in some of the processes and systems in place. These included inconsistencies with the way first contact with children and young people is processed, and the quality and support to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless. It also found inconsistencies in the level of understanding that care leavers have about the range of support available to them.

The report outlined seven points for improvement, which have either been implemented already through small amends to systems or processes, or are in progress.

➤ **Major scrapyards fire most likely sparked by discarded battery, fire investigators conclude**

The fire at Sackers in Gipping Road, Great Blakenham, on Thursday, August 8, resulted in a major response by Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service. The fire at Sackers saw 14 appliances and more than 80 firefighters deployed to deal with it. It was brought under control late on Thursday and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service subsequently launched an investigation into the cause.

This has established that the most likely cause was a battery which had made its way into a pile of scrap metal. If batteries, or electricals containing batteries, are not properly separated they can end up being crushed in the waste and recycling process.

When punctured they can self-combust, setting fire to any surrounding dry and flammable waste and recycling.

The conclusion is that waste batteries and electrical items should never be thrown into household waste.

Instead, they can be recycled at any of Suffolk's 11 Recycling Centres, as well as other local recycling banks. Many supermarkets also accept them.

Electricals containing batteries that tend to be discarded the most are smaller, frequently used and often cheaper electricals like toothbrushes, shavers, chargers, and toys.

➤ **Solar Together launches in Suffolk**

Residents of Suffolk can come together to invest in renewable energy sources through a group-buying scheme for solar panels and battery storage. Solar Together Suffolk helps homeowners feel confident that they are paying the right price for a high-quality installation from qualified installers.

Suffolk residents can join the group-buying scheme, which offers solar panels with optional battery storage and EV charge points, as well as retrofit battery storage for residents who have already invested in solar panels and are looking to get more from the renewable energy they generate. The scheme allows homeowners to increase their independence from the national grid.

It's free to register, and there is no obligation to go ahead with an installation. Suffolk's councils are working in partnership with iChoosr, experts in sustainable energy transition, to make the transition to clean energy as cost-effective and hassle-free as possible.

To date, Solar Together has installed 13,750 solar panels in Suffolk, reducing carbon emissions by 27,100 tonnes over 25 years – equivalent to 15,000 cars off the road in that time! iChoosr's schemes have been delivered in partnership with local authorities in five countries. More than 180 schemes have led to 178,000 residents installing solar PV systems.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, chairman of Suffolk's Environment Portfolio Holders Group, said:

"Solar Together Suffolk has been successfully running for six years now, seeing hundreds of solar and battery installations across the county.

"A recent survey of Suffolk customers showed that the main reason for their installation was to do good for the climate and environment, followed by saving money on bills and reducing their reliance on the grid.

"Homes account for nearly a quarter of all Suffolk's CO2 emissions. Through the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, we are helping homeowners and landlords make their homes and lifestyles as sustainable and energy efficient as possible. This can be through improving insulation, how homes are heated, electric vehicle infrastructure, or solar panels and batteries."

Richard from Bures, near Sudbury, recently shared his experience with Solar Together Suffolk and said:

"Excellent! Solar Together Suffolk took all the hassle of finding a provider, and the group-buying secured me a better discount than trying to do this on my own. It was a no-brainer."

How does it work?

Householders can register online to become part of the group for free and without obligation at solartogether.co.uk/suffolk

➤ **Two Suffolk flood investigation reports published in latest response to Storm Babet**

The investigations into the flooding which occurred in Needham Market and Wickham Market during October 2023 have analysed what caused these events and recommend what could be done to alleviate flooding there in the future.

In Needham Market, over 45 residential and commercial properties were internally flooded. In Wickham Market, it was 40 properties. In both communities, infrastructure and services were disrupted.

The investigations found that the areas were severely impacted by flooding due to the intensity of rainfall that overwhelmed the natural flow routes and the capacity of watercourses and drainage infrastructure. This situation was compounded when overland flow paths converged with the water from rivers that had burst their banks.

Key recommendations for both areas, which include short, medium and long term proposals aimed at individual homeowners, community groups, landowners and Risk Management Authorities, include:

- Implementing community flood plans
- Maximising use of grants available to make properties more resilient to flooding
- Removing blockages in watercourses and drains (private and publicly owned)
- Investigating potential improvements to drainage infrastructure (private and publicly owned)
- Creating new natural flood management features (e.g.: storage ponds and planting that 'slows the flow' of flood water)
- Further modelling to better understand flooding within the location (Wickham Market only).

These actions should help mitigate local flood risk going forward.

➤ **Virtual Fostering and Adoption Sessions for the Stour Valley**

Fostering is a flexible role with options for short term care from a weekend a month to longer term opportunities, all providing life-changing support for local children. Suffolk will continue with Foster Carer Recruitment Event on the 1st Wednesday of every month, and an Adoption Event is on the 1st Thursday all 7:00pm in the home of the applicant. To book a place please email Claire.Gwatkin@suffolk.gov.uk.

My Priorities

Education - Supporting Vulnerable People - Jobs and Growth - Localism and the Stour Valley - Building on Suffolk's Strength all underpinned by strong financial management and fair council tax.