

August 2024 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Remembering Councillor Peter Gould

Suffolk County Council pays tribute to Councillor Peter Gould, who died on Friday 19th July.

Councillor Liz Harsant, Chairman of Suffolk County Council, said:

“It is with great sadness that this council remembers Cllr Peter Gould, who sadly passed away on Friday. “Peter was elected as a county councillor in May 2021 and represented the division of Hoxne and Eye, where he also served as an Eye Town Councillor and Mid Suffolk District Councillor. Peter dedicated his life to local politics, including senior positions in local Government across the country, and as a committed public servant in Suffolk. He was very well known and respected in his community and achieved a great deal for those living there, including being a staunch advocate for Hartismere Hospital. “A champion of local people, his loss will be greatly felt, and our thoughts and sympathies are with his family and friends at this time.”

Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“Peter was always a great sounding board with his many years of experience in local government and I valued his friendship, support and words of wisdom.

“My thoughts and prayers are with his wife, friends and family at this difficult time.”

Councillors approve an extra £9.1 million for SEND services

Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet agreed further investment of £9.1 million over three years to expand special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services at its meeting on Wednesday 24 July. Funding will pay for new permanent SEND staff to support children and young people. This year more than £20 million would have been committed to expanding the service. The additional investment will mean that more than 30 new permanent members of staff will be recruited to help the council keep up with expected need for SEND services and deliver its important improvement plans. It would also pay for contracts to secure more educational psychology capacity – key to helping children and young people access the help they need. This investment is in addition to the £11.2 million over three years agreed by Cabinet in February 2024, which is being used to grow the SEND team by 15% or around 60 members of staff. In total, the council is proposing to commit more than £20 million over the next three years to bolster SEND services. At the moment, our staff have significant workloads and are under pressure to deliver our improvement plans. This new investment will increase productivity, lead to reductions in staff absences and enable important improvements to the experiences of Suffolk’s children and young people, and their families. Reforming SEND services is our top priority and this investment, especially given the challenging financial situation we face, shows our commitment. Of the £9.1 million, £2.6 million will be spent in 2024/25. This investment in permanent staff will recur in subsequent years as they continue to support children and young people with SEND. In 2025/26, £500,000 will be added to the SEND budget and in 2026/27, a further £500,000 will be added – both of which will be recurrent in subsequent years. This investment follows an Area SEND inspection by Ofsted and CQC in November 2023, which found widespread failings across the Local Area Partnership. As a result of this, the partnership, which delivers SEND services and is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, published a Priority Action Plan. One of the actions in the plan includes increasing the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care plans and Annual Reviews. The proposed new staff would, in part, support the delivery of this work.

Council remains opposed to Norwich to Tilbury pylons

Suffolk County Council has formally objected to National Grid's current proposals for pylons between Norwich and Tilbury, as it submits its response to the project's statutory consultation. Various reports support the council's position of objecting to the scheme and the council has reiterated the scope for the project to be delayed. This, in turn, opens up the opportunity for a full assessment of other viable alternatives, such as an offshore solution or the undergrounding of cables. The scale of the proposed project will affect 10 different electoral divisions in Suffolk, and have a considerable impact on their communities. These impacts go beyond the aesthetics of the project, including harm to National Landscapes, the consequences of HGV construction traffic on rural roads, serious implications on nine airfields, and the cumulative effects of other energy projects, in particular solar farms. Notwithstanding the council's overall objection to the scheme, it has also put forward comprehensive and detailed proposals to reduce the damage done to Suffolk's communities and environment, should it be consented by the Secretary of State following an examination in public next year. The submission of our formal response to this statutory consultation is the culmination of many months work listening to, and standing up for, Suffolk's communities. Pylon-free solutions remain possible, and National Grid and Ofgem need to take these seriously and fully assess the options. I am grateful to members of the public, councillors at all levels, and our staff who have worked tirelessly across our communities highlighting the deficiencies of this scheme. From impacts on private airfields and public rights of way, through damage to our unique landscapes and ecology, and the impact on the setting of listed buildings and our farming community – all of these issues and more have been brought to us and improved the quality of our submission."

Recent reports help to support the council's position:

The ESO East Anglia Network Study by The National Grid Electricity System Operator, explored better ways to connect offshore wind in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. The council previously stated that it was critical for National Grid to take these findings into consideration as they continue planning their Great Grid Upgrade, including the Norwich to Tilbury project.

The "Valued Landscape Assessment" of the Waveney Valley, commissioned by Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, acts as a timely reminder to National Grid, of the need to respond effectively and robustly to the sensitivities of Suffolk's landscapes and communities.

The Hiorns Smart Energy Networks report, commissioned by Essex County Council in close collaboration with Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, suggested that it is possible for the Norwich to Tilbury project to be paused in order to consider alternatives.

The report summarises that 'there is the opportunity to pause development of the Norwich to Tilbury project. This is something which must be recognised, so that the best possible solution can be fully explored to help provide energy security to the country, whilst being fair to, and supportive of, the many communities that will be affected. The proposals for this project do not go far enough. I will not stand for our communities being swept aside and ignored in the pursuit of unnecessarily, fast-tracked energy projects.

The statutory consultation for the Norwich to Tilbury project closed on 26 July 2024, with an application submission expected to the Planning Inspectorate in 2025.

Matthew Hicks - County Councillor for the Thredling Division

Tel : 01728 628176 Mob : 07824 474741 E-mail : matthew.hicks@suffolk.gov.uk