

## **September 2024 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks**

### **Major scrapyards fire most likely sparked by discarded battery**

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. This was a major incident that caused massive disruption to a great many people and saw firefighters put themselves potentially in harm's way as they bravely dealt with it. We all use batteries, we all benefit from them, and therefore it is everyone's responsibility to dispose of them safely. I would urge people to learn from this incident – please, when you get rid of a battery, do it properly. At the height of the Sackers fire there were a total of 14 fire engines - around 80 firefighters at the scene, which included appliances from Essex and Norfolk. Local residents and businesses were advised to keep doors and windows closed for nearly 24 hours as a massive smoke plume, which could be seen for miles, rose above the site. Trains were also severely affected as rail services from Ipswich to Norwich, Cambridge and Ely were cancelled owing to the potential danger from the fire to the adjacent railway track. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) said in May that lithium-ion batteries thrown in household rubbish bins had led to more than 1,200 fires in the UK waste system in the last 12 months, compared to 700 in 2022. In June last year operations were disrupted at Haverhill waste transfer station in Homefield Road after fire broke out amongst 50 tonnes of rubbish and which is thought to have been caused by a battery. 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. More information can be found at the Suffolk Waste Partnership [www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk/](http://www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk/)

### **Small improvements 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. It is disappointing that Ofsted didn't find all our services to be consistently good. However, what really counts is that the report shows that our children are safe and well-taken care of and - in particular - our children in care are thriving. We need to improve some of our processes and systems, and address inconsistencies in the way we do things. These things can be improved with small uncomplicated amends and a plan of action agreed by Ofsted. I was delighted to read the extent of praise for staff throughout the report, including the strength of relationships with the children and families we work with, and their sensitivity and compassion. This public recognition is huge testament to their hard work and dedication. The inspection looked at four areas; the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families; the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; the experiences and progress of children in

care; and the experiences and progress of care leavers. Although the majority of the report is positive, three of these were graded as 'requires improvement to be good'. The experience and progress of children in care was 'good'. Following publication of the report, an action plan will be sent to Ofsted by the end of September and a partnership board will be set up to oversee improvements. The council will also carry out a quality assurance review of systems and processes. You can read the report at [www.reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80565](http://www.reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80565)

### **Suffolk residents will be able to access electric vehicles on a short-term basis**

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 - [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). 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.

### **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 here, and there is no obligation to go ahead with an installation. Together Suffolk has been successfully running for six years now, seeing hundreds of solar and battery installations across the county. Approved UK solar PV suppliers participate in a reverse auction. They are able to offer competitive pricing as the volume and geographic concentration makes it possible for them to realise greater efficiencies, which they pass on with lower prices for installations. After the auction, registered households will be emailed a personal recommendation which is specific to the details they submitted in their registration. If they choose to accept their recommendation, the specifics of their installation will be confirmed with a technical survey after which a date can be set for the installation of their solar PV system. Telephone and email helpdesks are on-hand throughout the whole process which, together with information sessions, will allow households to make an informed decision in a safe and hassle-free environment.  
[www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/initiatives/solar-together-suffolk](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/initiatives/solar-together-suffolk)

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