

March 2025 Parish Report

East Suffolk Council GLI Group – Councillor Update

Free holiday activities and food available this Easter

Theatre, sport and filmmaking are just some of the free activities on offer during the school holidays this Easter as part of the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme – and bookings are now open!

Numerous organisations across the district will be providing fun and enriching activities and food for children and young people over the Easter holidays. Running from Monday 7 April to Sunday 20 April, there are over 35 programmes on offer with over 4,000 places available to book.

The HAF programme has been funded by the UK Government for an additional year following four years of delivery. The programme provides activities for children and young people, particularly those in receipt of free school meals and is overseen by Suffolk County Council and coordinated locally by East Suffolk Council.

Holiday activities are varied and can introduce young people to new experiences and skills, such as teamwork and problem solving, as well as providing opportunities for physical and social activity. Each funded holiday activity also offers a free meal.

In Suffolk, the programme is targeted at those eligible for benefits-related free school meals, and other vulnerable children, or those with additional needs who would benefit from accessing the programme.

GLI Cllr Sarah Whitelock, East Suffolk Council's cabinet member for Communities, Culture, Leisure and Tourism said: "Holiday activity programmes enable young people to get involved in a wide range of different activities to help keep them active over the school holidays, benefitting both their physical and mental health, building confidence and helping them to learn new skills. The activities also provide support for families who may be struggling with the costs of food and energy, which can be exacerbated during the school holidays."

Places are redeemed by eligible families through the online booking system Eequ, which has replaced the old system of HAF codes that were issued to schools. Booking is simple:

- Families can select the programmes and dates they wish to attend.
- Once you have selected a programme, Eequ will ask about HAF eligibility, such as being in receipt of benefit-related free school meals.
- The booking will be reviewed and approved by the HAF team at Suffolk County Council and by the provider.
- You will then receive reminders from the provider of the activity about your chosen activities.

Book your place now at: <https://eequ.org/suffolkhaf>

For any queries, please contact: HAF@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

No compelling case for a single mega council in Suffolk

The Leaders of the county's five district and borough councils have responded to the decision

by Suffolk County Council to submit interim proposals for a single unitary authority, as part of the Local Government Review process.

Cllr Deborah Saw (Babergh District Council), Cllr Caroline Topping (East Suffolk Council), Cllr Neil MacDonald (Ipswich Borough Council), Cllr Andy Mellen (Mid Suffolk District Council) and Cllr Cliff Waterman (West Suffolk Council) said:

“Any case for a huge and remote ‘mega council’, delivering services to three-quarters of a million people across a vast geographical area, is no more compelling today than it was when it was first announced.

“Leadership would be more remote and distant, not stronger, with a real risk that communities feel ignored and unconnected from their representatives. A multi-unitary solution for Suffolk would address these concerns head on, providing meaningful democratic representation which enables communities and economies to thrive.

“Keeping local government truly local will ensure that our communities are heard, and their needs are met effectively. Only our proposals can meet the government’s criteria to deliver financial sustainability, drive better outcomes, find tailored local solutions, create efficient services, economic growth and strong community engagement; all thanks to unitary structures that are big enough to deliver but close enough to care and connect.

“This is a critically important generational change to the way local government and services are delivered, and our proposals - which recognise the county’s diversity - are far more fit for the future than unimaginative plans which amount to little more than simply bolting all council services together.”

Working together for sustainable farming future

A group of key farming and food sector stakeholders met with East Suffolk Council to discuss shared ambitions for producers and consumers.

Hosted by East Suffolk Council at Trinity Park – home of the county’s agricultural association – the roundtable meeting highlighted both the challenges and ‘win-win’ growth opportunities for resilience, sustainability and biodiversity through local food production and consumption.

The event was organised to recognise and promote the crucial role of farmers in East Suffolk, encourage the growth of local food businesses, and inform policymakers – sharing ideas on finding balanced solutions that support the local economy and supply chains while preserving and enhancing the environment and food security.

Responses collected from the event will help inform future policies and actions at East Suffolk Council. Environmental Impact and a Thriving Economy are two pillars of the Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent administration’s strategic plan. Chaired by NFU Suffolk’s Glenn Buckingham, attendees also included local farmers and representatives of Suffolk Agricultural Association, Country Land and Business Association (CLA), Fram Farmers, Sizewell C, Hydrogen East, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, and local businesses, including Wakelyns agroforestry hub.

East Suffolk Council’s economic development and climate change teams were also joined by GLI Cabinet members Cllr Sally Noble (Environment), Cllr Vince Langdon-Morris (Resources and Value for Money), Cllr Sarah Whitelock (Communities, Culture, Leisure and Tourism), Cllr David Beavan (Housing) and Cllr Tom Daly (Energy and Climate Change).

As well as local food production and consumption, topics for discussion at the meeting included future potential for Hydrogen use in agricultural vehicles, and East Suffolk Council's ambitious Tree and Hedgerow Strategy, which includes working with local landowners to help identify land which could be used for tree planting or making improvements for nature.

GLI Cllr Langdon-Morris, who set up the event, said:

"We managed to convene a small, but well-attended lunchtime event, that led to innovative and interesting discussions by the experienced and qualified audience.

"As a local authority, we will follow up and translate the points made into concrete actions. For example, by providing planning training to local farmers that enables them to make their land more productive, yet also resilient – including to flooding, and at the same time enhance wildlife and biodiversity."

Wild spaces return to support nature across East Suffolk

A conservation scheme which will create over 100 spaces for the benefit of wildlife is returning for another year, with a new name and a brand-new look.

116 wild spaces will be left to grow during the spring and summer as part of East Suffolk Council's 'Nature at Work' scheme, which is being delivered in partnership with environmental charity Groundwork East.

New signs have been installed on council-owned land across the district to help identify the wild areas where grass cutting will be limited to twice per year for the benefit of pollinators such as bees and butterflies. The signs feature a QR code directing people to further information about the scheme, including how residents and community groups can get involved. A map of all the sites is available online, and photos from the locations will be added throughout the year; to view this, please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/5d63wvy9>

Additionally, Groundwork East will be visiting local schools to help them create their own Nature at Work sites in their school grounds, and later in the year, Groundwork East will be working with town and parish councils to build awareness of the sites. Town and parish councils will be encouraged to help monitor the sites to better understand what species are present and how the sites are changing.

GLI Cllr Sally Noble, East Suffolk's cabinet member for the Environment said: "Nature at Work aims to respond to the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis by supporting nature at small-scale community sites across East Suffolk. We are delighted to be bringing this scheme back with a new refreshed look and a renewed focus on supporting local schools, town and parish councils and community groups to get involved. Since the 1930s, the UK has lost over 97% of its wildflower meadows and grasslands which has had a devastating effect on the species that depend on these habitats for food and shelter.

"I would encourage people to check the online map and find their nearest Nature at Work site, and to use the resources on our dedicated webpage to find out more about the importance of leaving spaces to go wild and learn how to get involved in your own garden."

Ten East Suffolk schools will be supported by Groundwork East to create native wildflower meadows and habitats for wildlife on their school grounds. These spaces can then be used for learning activities, encouraging future generations to be conscious of and inspired by the natural world.

Ease the Squeeze on Cost of Living

Are you, or someone you know, worried about the increasing cost of living? We understand the pressures faced by many people today and we are working closely with key partners to ensure support is available to help ease the squeeze for households in East Suffolk.

To make it as easy as possible for you to access the services and support available, locally and nationally, we have gathered information about them in one place:

www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/community/squeeze/

For the most up to date information regarding East Suffolk Council, please visit:

www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk

View the Well Minds East Suffolk booklet: tinyurl.com/9xhka624