

April 2026 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Suffolk road schemes included in Government's five year investment plan

Suffolk County Council has welcomed the government's announcement of its next five-year Road Investment Strategy (RIS) which features four key projects in the county. The RIS is the Department for Transport's investment plan for operating, maintaining, renewing and enhancing the strategic trunk road network in England. Known as RIS3, it runs from April 2026 to March 2031 and in Suffolk sees:

- A12 improvements at Woodbridge – a recommitment by the government to funding its share during this period of the £63 million scheme to upgrade the A12 between the Seven Hills junction with the A14 and the Woods Lane junction, subject to Suffolk County Council submitting the Final Business Case, anticipated for later this year.
- A140 - A1120 Earl Stonham junction improvements – this has been classed as a scheme 'recommended to continue', where the government accepts work on developing improvements should go ahead during this period. However, this is subject to affordability, value for money and deliverability assessments.
- The junction is an historic staggered crossroads where queuing traffic causes congestion. The improvement scheme would realign the eastern A1120 arm, providing more space for vehicles to queue and avoiding vehicle conflicts by simplifying the junction.
- Improvements to the A11 Fiveways junction near Mildenhall and
- The A12/A14 Copdock interchange.

These will see the government and National Highways continue to develop but not deliver them during the RIS3 period. Both schemes remain uncommitted and with no guaranteed funding, but it does mean they have a better chance of being included in the next RIS after 2031. Both Copdock interchange- a key junction serving freight traffic bound to and from the Port of Felixstowe – and the A11 junction have suffered from problems of congestion and design flaws. Full details of the scheme can be found on the [Department for Transport](#) website.

Government announces outcome of local government reorganisation in Suffolk

The government has announced its decision on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Suffolk in 2028, opting for three unitary authorities – despite clear evidence that this is not the best outcome for Suffolk. This is a major milestone in the future of local government in the county and reshapes how councils are structured and how services are delivered across the county. Each of the three new unitary councils will cover their own new geographical area: West Suffolk, East Suffolk, and South Suffolk and Ipswich.

Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

"I am astounded that the government has made the decision to divide our great county through the creation of three independent authorities based on random geographies. LGR provided a huge opportunity to improve the services our residents rely on, and I strongly believe that a single authority was the only way to do this. Dividing our county into three new areas carries huge risks to service provision for vulnerable people and long-term financial resilience.

“Throughout the process we have been clear that a single authority for the whole county would not only be the most financially resilient, saving £40 million a year, but it would also be the best option for improving service delivery.

“I strongly believe the three council case for change lacked significant supporting evidence and delivery plans, making the Government’s decision even more ludicrous. Senior leaders from across Suffolk highlighted their concerns with the plan, however, their views appear to have been ignored.”

Cllr Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform said:

“This decision threatens the future financial stability of local government in Suffolk, and I fear the net result will be substantial cuts to local services. The One Suffolk proposal clearly outlined how one council is the only financially viable option, offering the best opportunity to improve local services.

“Splitting up key county-wide services that vulnerable residents rely on, such as adult social care and children’s services, is an enormous risk. Not only will it put those most in need at risk, Government opting for three new councils means Suffolk will be £145 million worse off in the first 5 years and £13 million worse off every year thereafter.

“We’ve been sold the fairytale that smaller councils must be more local, however three new councils will mean three sets of senior staff, three sets of back-office services and three times the bureaucracy. I stand by the fact that a single council for Suffolk is the smartest, simplest and best option for our county and think a significant opportunity has been missed but I’ve come to expect little else from this hopeless Government.”

The creation of three unitary authorities for Suffolk will mean the abolition of all Suffolk’s councils:

- Suffolk County Council
- East Suffolk Council
- West Suffolk Council
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils
- Ipswich Borough Council

While detailed boundaries are still being finalised, the creation of three unitary councils, West Suffolk, East Suffolk, and South Suffolk and Ipswich, means that from May 2028 the new councils will replace the following:

- **West Suffolk:** West Suffolk Council, as well as parts of Babergh and Mid Suffolk Council
- **East Suffolk:** East Suffolk Council, as well as parts of Mid Suffolk Council
- **South Suffolk and Ipswich:** Ipswich Borough Council as well as parts of Babergh Council, and East Suffolk Council

Elections for the new shadow authorities will take place in May 2027, with the new councils formally taking over responsibilities from May 2028.

£3.9 million investment proposal to protect and enhance Public Rights of Way

Suffolk County Council plans to invest nearly £4 million to improve and protect the public rights of way network. The network, which provides more than 3,500 miles of off-road access for walking, cycling and horse riding, is supported by 3,770 structures including bridges, boardwalks, revetments and signposts. A report considered by Suffolk County Council's Cabinet on Tuesday March 24 said the £3.9 million investment will enable replacement or refurbishment of 735 priority structures, with a particular focus on bridges and boardwalks in central and coastal areas. It follows a comprehensive condition survey where the council has identified a programme of improvements to replace or refurbish ageing structures. The report says that over the next five years, 1,800 structures will need to be replaced or undergo major refurbishment. Of these, 735 structures have been prioritised for 2026/27 and 2027/28 due to their known condition. The structures are spread across the county, with the largest impact in the central and coastal area of Suffolk. These are predominantly bridges but there are also a number of boardwalks on key coastal and estuary routes. The cost of this two-year programme is £3.9 million in total - £2.05 million in 2026/27 and £1.85 million in 27/28. The current budget for infrastructure maintenance is £225,000 a year, but since this figure was set in 2020/21 costs have risen by more than 50% for materials and contractors' installation fees, as well as changes in specifications. The council's investment plan comes at a time of significantly increased public use of the network. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, customer reports have risen by more than 50%, with 3,411 reports received in 2025 alone. By investing now, the Council aims to reduce the risk of route closures, avoid rising revenue costs and ensure the network continues to provide high-quality access for residents and visitors. Temporary closures—required when structures become unsafe—cost around £1,200 each time and place pressure on the revenue budget, which also funds the county's annual grass-cutting programme. The planned capital investment will help prevent these costs and protect essential maintenance services. It will also help to meet the council's objectives for health and wellbeing, strengthening the local economy and providing value for taxpayers' money. The full report can be read on the SCC website.

New Ipswich recycling centre to break ground, which will provide smoother, safer visits

The modern, purpose-built facility will be a major upgrade on the existing recycling centre at Portman's Walk, approximately three times bigger and able to take significantly more bookings. The centre's new home on the Hadleigh Road Industrial Estate, will be a significant improvement for recycling for the town and the surrounding area. Suffolk County Council has recently acquired planning permission, an environmental permit and ownership of the land – the former Ipswich Borough Council depot on Whittle Road. The majority of the existing structures at the site will be demolished, which is due to begin in early summer 2026. Features of Ipswich's new recycling centre will include:

- A raised platform giving visitors an elevated position from which to safely dispose of waste – removing the need for steps

- A one-way system and easy-to-use layout,

- No need to close the facility to replace full containers

- Improved accessibility and increased capacity for recycling and donating items for reuse

- Greater separation between public vehicles and larger vehicles

- Queuing capacity within the site and better access from the public highway compared to the current Portman's Walk site

- The new site will be 3 times bigger than the Portman's Walk site

- Further information on recycling in Suffolk can be found at www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk

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