

**Sustainability Strategy 2013 - 2018**  
**A sustainable future for West Suffolk**

Draft for consultation

Date Approved:  
Contact:

Katharine Smith, Sustainable Development Officer

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#### **What is West Suffolk?**

For the purposes of this Strategy, West Suffolk covers Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils. We share borders with Cambridge, South and East Cambridgeshire, Breckland, Norfolk and Essex. The two Councils are largely rural in nature; Forest Heath has three main towns Brandon, Newmarket and Mildenhall. St Edmundsbury has two towns, Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill.

## **Preface**

Increasing demands for resources such as land, food, energy and water necessitate a better balance between our economic and social needs without compromising the needs of others or the state of the environment. The changing climate may also have significant implications, both positive and negative. West Suffolk is not isolated from these challenges.

For many decades, local authorities have played a strategic delivery role in shaping the quality of the local area, whether it has been through the planning framework, providing key services such as waste collection, public health, cleansing and housing to ensure that the local community can function and prosper or enabling others to live fulfilling lives in a safe environment.

Working together, Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) and St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) are committed to managing the effects that our activities have on the natural environment. In this Strategy and the supporting action plan a range of issues have been identified which the Councils wish to influence through our services at a local level.

We recognise the value of working with the wider community in West Suffolk, including the commercial and voluntary sectors as well as locally significant organisations if we all are to make genuine progress on reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and becoming a more climate resilient place. Our collaborative approach should also help us find resources to deliver appropriate solutions to meet the challenges.

The challenge of creating a sustainable future is great. We will strive to achieve the ambitions contained in our Strategy, allowing the benefits to be felt by residents, communities and businesses as well as the protection of our natural environment in West Suffolk.

## **Jargon Buster**

CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon Dioxide
DECC	Department for Energy and Climate Change
WHECA	Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act
FHDC	Forest Heath District Council
GEP	Green Economy Pathfinder
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LNP	Local Nature Partnership
PBO	Professional Buying Organisations
SCAP	Suffolk Climate Change Action Plan
SCCP	Suffolk Climate Change Partnership
SEBC	St Edmundsbury Borough Council
SSP	Suffolk Strategic Partnership
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SWP	Suffolk Waste Partnership

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# **1. The West Suffolk Sustainability Strategy**

## **1.1 Aim and objectives**

Our aim is for a sustainable future for West Suffolk.

To deliver this aim, we will endeavour to:

**Be a community leader:** Where possible, our business activities will demonstrate best sustainable practices and our estate, transport fleet and assets will play their part in cutting our energy and water use. In so doing, we will work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2025 (against 2004 levels)

**Build a strong resilient economy:** We will help businesses become more resource efficient, resilient to a changing climate, and be able to take advantage of any opportunities

**Reduce fuel poverty:** We will strive so that everyone who lives in West Suffolk has the opportunity to live in a decent and affordably warm home

**Respond by adapting to a changing climate:** We will ensure that our services are climate-resilient and help others in West Suffolk to be the same

**Help local communities become energy and water efficient:** By influencing the design and construction of building projects we can have a significant impact on the sustainability of development in the area. We will also work with others to find cost-effective refurbishment solutions to improve energy and water efficiency

**Ensure green open spaces for all:** We will work to protect and enhance local biodiversity through coherent design and protection so that wildlife can flourish and landscapes can be enjoyed

**Secure high levels of recycling and low levels of waste to landfill:** We will support households and businesses to manage waste by ensuring we have suitable and reliable waste collection and recycling infrastructure in place.

We will progress our objectives in line with each of the Council's corporate priorities. More details can be found via the following links:

[www.forest-heath.gov.uk](http://www.forest-heath.gov.uk)

[www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk](http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk)

## **1.2 Our action plan**

Sustainability is embedded across a wide variety of each Council's activities. The action plan supporting this Strategy does not replace any existing plans delivered by our services, but aims to reinforce and highlight the importance of these activities in addition to setting our future direction and activities needed to help us achieve our aim and objectives.

The action plan will set out:

- What we plan to do and by when
- How our performance will be measured
- What outputs and outcomes are anticipated
- What resources we will use to achieve the actions
- Who we will work with.

## **1.3 Resources and funding to deliver this Strategy**

We have allocated resources to deliver this Strategy. We will also continue to work with others through key partnerships such as the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (SCCP) so that effective support can be offered to our residents, communities and businesses.

We aim to take advantage of opportunities as they arise and where appropriate to develop new working arrangements to access funds and/or support which will benefit residents, communities and businesses in West Suffolk in line with this Strategy.

## **1.4 Consulting and communicating with others**

We will:

- Undertake our work to deliver this Strategy and its associated actions in as transparent a way as possible
- Communicate risk and opportunity in clear-cut terms
- Regularly report on what we are doing in support of the Strategy.

## **1.5 Managing and accessing information**

We already gather a variety of information from various sources in support of our work. This information may take different forms. So, it is important that the information is managed systematically and can be readily accessible. Information will need to be kept up-to-date and we will regularly check and review the status of key data to ensure the information we have is current and accurate.

Local authorities are subject to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, the Data Protection Act and the Environmental Information Regulations. Accordingly, we are committed to ensuring open access to information unless there are specific legal or technical reasons preventing us doing so.

General information and advice about Sustainability is available on our websites. Specific enquiries can be made through our websites, by email, telephone, in writing or in person.

There may be cost associated with answering an enquiry subject to the abovementioned statutes. We will say in advance if there will be a charge and ensure that it is reasonable.

### **1.6 Reporting progress**

We will report publically on our progress, using our Committees and through service reporting of performance. We will also use less-formal ways of reporting including our websites, press releases, newsletters and through articles and other forms of communication. We will endeavour, as far as practical, to report on our activities in an accurate, meaningful and responsible way.

### **1.7 Reviewing the Strategy**

We will review our Strategy every five years, as a minimum; although more frequent reviews may be undertaken should these be needed. We will endeavour to ensure that any required changes to the Strategy are implemented in a timely and effective manner.

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## **2. Strategy themes**

This Strategy cuts across a number of themes. As such, it will relate to everything we, as Councils, do. Implementing many of the proposals will be through other strategies, programmes, major projects and decisions.

The following section breaks down our work into individual issues and areas of work. There are many links between the themes and they should not be taken to be exclusive areas of work.

### **2.1 Creating sustainable economic growth**

The prosperity of West Suffolk's economy has been built on a combination of traditional sectors, like agriculture/food processing and manufacturing, and service sectors including finance and public administration.

Sustainability provides a great opportunity for improving both diversity of economic basis and business performance in an increasingly competitive world. The challenge is to raise awareness about the impact of choice and encourage the use of local services, products and markets.

We aim to build the identity of West Suffolk as a distinct economic sub-region ensuring we derive maximum benefit from our position within both the New Anglian and Greater Cambridgeshire Local Enterprise Partnership areas.

We will work towards a low carbon economy by exploiting economic opportunities which may arise by:

- Increasing awareness amongst businesses of the impact of climate change and how they can become more resilient
- Improving business resource efficiency
- Encouraging the sustainable generation of energy and supporting the associated economic sector
- Increasing waste recycling in business and promoting waste reduction
- Increasing the share of business markets for environmental goods and services
- Actively promoting a Green Tourism offer.

### **2.2 Energy conservation and renewable energy**

In Suffolk we are aiming to cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 60% by 2025 against a 2004 baseline<sup>1</sup>. We hope to achieve this through a combination of energy conservation and use of renewable energy.

Energy conservation not only helps to reduce energy use, it can result in significant financial savings along with improved environmental quality, and resilience to a volatile energy supply market.

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<sup>1</sup> Transforming Suffolk - Suffolk's Community Strategy 2008-2028. Suffolk Strategic Partnership



We want to ensure Council buildings are used as efficiently and effectively as possible and we should set an example to other organisations with property in the locality. Therefore, we are keen that each building we own or manage should play its part in reducing the consumption of energy.

Through the SCCP Business Adviser Service we are working with 'Small to Medium Enterprises' (SMEs) and qualifying 'not for profit' organisations to help them to assess their resource use. This advice can then lead to practical business improvement to cut costs and carbon emissions whilst improving environmental impact, staff awareness and understanding of the green agenda.

We will continue to support our local communities and residents by providing energy-related advice. We will continue to help as many residents as possible benefit from living in more energy efficient homes. This work includes promoting schemes designed to achieve cost-effective investment in energy efficiency such as the Government's Green Deal<sup>2</sup>.

Across West Suffolk, we are developing new ways of investing in renewable energy generation, for example using the Government's Clean Energy Cash back<sup>3</sup>. Further opportunities to invest are being identified at our own sites and also through community initiatives.

New financial arrangements created by the Community Infrastructure Levy<sup>4</sup> should create opportunities to support renewable and low carbon energy. Finance raised through the Levy, and other financial mechanisms, could contribute to strategic developments such as district heating networks and other opportunities for local energy generation and use. We will work to maximise local benefit from such financial mechanisms.

### **2.3 Affordable warmth**

Every year, mortality rises by 19% in the winter months in England<sup>5</sup>. This amounts to an average of 27,000 'excess' winter deaths or about 1,560 more people per week dying between December and March compared with the rest of the year. Around a fifth of these deaths can be attributed to cold homes<sup>6</sup>. However, in many northern European countries with much colder weather than ours such a rise of this scale is not seen.

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<sup>2</sup> Launched in January 2013, the Green Deal is the Coalition Government's initiative aims to deliver a step change in the update of energy efficiency measures in both households and business premises by creating the conditions for business investment and removing the barriers of knowledge and the need for up-front costs.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Gov.uk - Feed-in Tariffs: get money for generating your own electricity

<sup>4</sup> Source: gov.uk - Giving communities more power in planning local development - <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/giving-communities-more-power-in-planning-local-development/supporting-pages/community-infrastructure-levy>

<sup>5</sup> Cold Weather Plan for England - Protecting health and reducing harm from severe cold." Dept of Health and Health Protection Agency, Nov 2011

<sup>6</sup> "Cold Weather Plan for England - Protecting health and reducing harm from severe cold." Dept of Health and Health Protection Agency, Nov 2011

John Hills. Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics, October 2011

In Suffolk, on average over 400 excess winter deaths are recorded each year. The majority of these deaths are people aged over 65. Furthermore, many more people go to their GP and into hospital in winter with a range of cold weather-related conditions.

While the extent to which excess winter mortality and illnesses are caused directly by fuel poverty is uncertain; what is clear is that fuel poverty is a factor. The Government-commissioned Hills Review pointed to the cost to the NHS of the medical treatment associated with the health impacts of fuel poverty, ranging from depression to cardiovascular disease.

There are also wider concerns about the social impacts associated with living in cold homes, such as social isolation and poor educational attainment in young people. Some vulnerable households may spend more time at home and have particular needs so requiring more home energy.

The annual cost to the NHS of treating winter-related disease due to cold private housing is over £850 million. Public health evidence shows that investing £1 in keeping homes warm saved the NHS up to 42 pence in health costs annually.

Around 14% of households in West Suffolk are thought to be in fuel poverty<sup>7</sup>. Many of West Suffolk's communities are off the mains gas network while many properties are hard to make energy efficient because of the way they were built.

The varying quality of the housing stock and people's ability to access capital or the lowest prices for energy have meant that some households struggle to keep their homes affordably warm. The state of the economy and its impact on household income has seen some households forced into hard choices about heating their home in cold weather. All of these factors lead to significant variations in a household's energy spend and ability to afford warmth.

We are working to develop collective working arrangements with energy efficiency providers, including local suppliers where possible, to deliver Green Deal and ECO across our area, with the objective of drawing in funding to benefit fuel-poor households and those living in hard to treat properties.

We intend to assist vulnerable households by supporting national energy efficiency schemes such as the Energy Company Obligation<sup>8</sup> by drawing in external funding for targeted projects in key areas.

### **2.4 Health and well-being**

An individual's health is strongly influenced by their lifestyle and the environment in which they live and work. Medical care can prolong

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<sup>7</sup> Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fuel-poverty-2010-detailed-tables>  
Department for Energy & Climate Change, 2010

<sup>8</sup> The Energy Company Obligation is a financial support mechanism delivered through the Green Deal; to assist qualifying households to discounted energy efficiency measures.

survival after serious illness but social, economic and environmental conditions often influence whether a person is ill in the first place.

The effects of climate change on the living environment are a key concern as the UK population typically spends 90% of their time indoors. Weather extremes caused by a changing climate are likely to exacerbate health risks associated with building overheating, indoor air pollution and flood damage as well as wider disruption to services and local infrastructure which could affect emergency response. In addition, community-based accommodation such as residential and care homes, health centres and hospitals may also be adversely affected by high temperatures experienced during heat waves and flooding.

The Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board was established to improve health and wellbeing and decrease inequalities across Suffolk. Through its strategy the Board aims to ensure that people in Suffolk live long, fulfilling and healthy lives and the health inequalities gap between our affluent and poorer areas is narrowed.

In its shadow form, the Board has agreed four priority areas. These priorities were chosen using information from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and evidence that shows action in these areas will help attain their long term aims. The four priority areas are:

- Priority one: Every child in Suffolk has the best start in life
- Priority two: Suffolk residents have access to a healthy environment and take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing
- Priority three: Older people in Suffolk have a good quality of life
- Priority four: People in Suffolk have the opportunity to improve their mental health and wellbeing

West Suffolk has member representation on the Board supporting the programme covering the 4 priorities.

In West Suffolk we have our own Health and Wellbeing Forum which includes Councillors and local organisations to review and support issues that arise locally.

Recently, we have secured funding from the Clinical Commissioning Group to enable West Suffolk to have a Falls Prevention Exercise Coordinator who will work with residents to reduce slips, trips and falls.

We are also working with our partners to sustain in future years our winter fuel poverty programme which includes the successful Warm Homes Healthy People project.

### **2.5 Housing**

There is an increasingly strong link between adequate supplies of good quality housing and delivering successful and sustainable communities. Providing good quality affordable housing is a key factor in delivering and promoting the general health and well-being of the community.

The availability and quality of housing also has an impact on local economic development with the housing 'offer' playing a part in determining local economic success.

Key issues to be considered:

- The Councils have declining land stock and capital funds to facilitate new housing development
- Currently we have over 2,000 empty homes in West Suffolk which could be brought back into use
- We need to better understand the profile of rural housing needs and how we can ensure future housing developments address those needs.

Across West Suffolk, we are working with private landlords to promote and, where necessary, enforce improvements to their properties to meet current home standards.

We are contacting property owners of empty homes with the aim of bringing these properties back into use.

As part of the SCCP as well as within West Suffolk, we are working to develop collective working arrangements with energy efficiency providers, including local suppliers where possible, to deliver Green Deal and ECO across our area. We will promote to residents the opportunities for retrofit home improvements and funding available to those in receipt of certain benefits, those living in hard to treat properties such as a homes with solid walls, as well as area based funding for those in low income areas and rural properties off the mains gas network.

### **2.6 Natural and heritage capital**

Biodiversity is the variety of all life on Earth. It includes all species of animals and plants – everything that is alive on our planet. Biodiversity is important for its own sake, and human survival depends upon it. Our challenge is to prevent a decline in this natural capital for the benefit of current and future generations.

West Suffolk includes the Brecks to the north, the Stour and Dedham Vale to the south and many high quality river valleys. These are regarded as some of the most important natural habitats in the country.

For biodiversity to be enhanced, correct design, protection and management of these key areas is necessary to form a coherent and linked landscape in which wildlife can flourish.

Our countryside services work hard to conserve and enhance West Suffolk's special landscape and wildlife, working closely with land owners, local communities and partner organisations, to manage a number of important local sites, provide advice on countryside issues and to develop opportunities for access and enjoyment of the area. As part of this work we are supported extensively by volunteers who participate in community

projects, local nature reserve management, wildlife, ecological advice and a whole range of other projects which protect and enhance local habitats and wildlife.

West Suffolk is home to a wealth of heritage sites including many historic buildings, parkland and other key public spaces. We intend to preserve the area's built heritage, support their sympathetic use and development and promote their educational value.

To do this we support and provide grant aid to local museums and heritage centres within the area and manage certain sites such as Palace House, the former Newmarket home of Charles II, as well as the West Stow Anglo Saxon village among others.

### **2.7 The built environment**

Our built environment should inspire us and make us feel proud of our locality and diverse heritage. It should reduce whole life energy and materials costs through efficient use of natural resources. It should provide places which contribute to our physical and mental well-being and enhance creativity and productivity. Our built environment also needs to be flexible and adaptable to future uses, and be resilient to cope with a changing climate.

Across West Suffolk, we are incorporating sustainable development principles within the National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF<sup>9</sup>) into local planning policy. We are developing policies based on the Code for Sustainable Homes seeking CO<sub>2</sub> reduction standards for new homes which exceed the relevant Building Regulations in force at the time of the planning application.

By locating new developments on brownfield sites, near to public transport and local services, we can reduce the need to travel by car.

St Edmundsbury's Vision 2031<sup>10</sup> documents for Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and the Rural Area Action Plans will guide the overall direction of future service provision and management of growth in the borough over the next 20 years. These documents are part of the Local Development Framework, which establishes where and how development will take place across the borough.

In Forest Heath, similar documents to Vision 2031 are being developed. Sustainability will be one of the central elements of these documents with the aim of ensuring a sustainable built environment in West Suffolk.

Whilst new built environments can be designed to meet these aspirations we must not forget the legacy of our existing buildings and infrastructure, constructed when standards for efficiency were much lower. For example, at least 80% of our current housing stock will still be standing in 2050.

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<sup>9</sup> National Planning Policy Framework - [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Source: St Edmundsbury Borough Council - Vision 2031 - <http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/sebc-planning-policy-section/>

This means that retrofitting buildings to tackle resource efficiency is vitally important. As previously stated, we will work with others to promote and support the improvement of existing buildings to make them more resource efficient.

### **2.8 Managing our water resources**

As a region we will continue to face significant water challenges<sup>11</sup>. East Anglia is the driest part of the UK with an annual rainfall of just 70% of the national average. We rely on underground water resources supplied through the mains water grid network or from private supply boreholes.

We can expect to experience reduced water availability in summer leading to more frequent water restrictions and in the longer term this could lead to water shortages. The gap between demand and supply will potentially widen, affecting all sectors of society. Adaptive action is required to increase water efficiency across all sectors and manage water abstraction in the summer months.

Water resource management is particularly important considering our high levels of planned growth. Future water availability will have a significant impact on our local food production thus affecting the economics of farming, the food industry and our health.

We can manage future water availability through planned growth and creating suitable development planning documents to support water resource management which meet or exceed national regulations. We are developing local planning policies which support sustainable water supply and management. We will also continue to work with local water suppliers to support campaigns to promote water efficiency in existing buildings.

Conversely, a changing climate could see wetter winters and more extreme rainfall events in the region. An estimated 250,000 properties are at risk of flooding in the East of England, with 158,000 of those in Suffolk<sup>12</sup>. Although here in West Suffolk we are protected from coastal flooding we are already experiencing flash floods and high river levels during extreme weather events<sup>13</sup>.

The Suffolk Flood Management Partnership (SFMP), of which both Councils are members, has its own Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. Our primary focus is on 'local flooding' from surface water, groundwater or ordinary water courses such as streams and ditches. This type of 'flash flooding' generally caused by localised heavy rainfall is likely to become more common. We will work within the SFMP to help everyone understand and manage flood risk within the local area.

We will also work with individual developers as part of the planning process to make sure that water is managed effectively and that drainage

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<sup>11</sup> Source: East of England Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies (CAMS) – Environment Agency

<sup>12</sup> Suffolk Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, 2012

<sup>13</sup> Source: Environment Agency 2009. Flooding in England, A National Assessment of Flood Risk. Report Reference GEH00609BQDS-E-P

infrastructure is appropriately designed and provision given to its on-going maintenance, where appropriate.

### **2.9 Procurement**

In West Suffolk, the Councils deliver services to around 70,000 households and 6,000 businesses, either directly or by employing others to act on our behalf. Much of the work we do is either delivered directly by our staff using goods and services which we have procured or indirectly by others under contract.

The Government's National Procurement Strategy<sup>14</sup> requires every council to build sustainability into its procurement policy, processes and contracts. This has recently been reinforced by the Social Value Act which places a duty on public bodies to consider social value ahead of a procurement decision being made.

It is therefore important that we align our buying approach with national legal and policy requirements whilst taking account of our locality's needs and circumstances.

We are committed to improving our efficiency and reducing procurement costs. We will work to use a mix of the best suppliers to promote a diverse and competitive economy. Achieving our aim depends on such factors as:

- The quality of products and services available to us;
- The cost of products and services;
- The availability of products and services; and
- Our commitment to equality, sustainability and health and safety.

We already evaluate all our major contracts against sustainability criteria when we select suppliers and are working to target key contracts with higher standards where the risks and opportunities for more sustainable practices exist.

We will be developing a West Suffolk Procurement Strategy within which will plan to embed the principles of sustainability to drive environmental improvement through our supply chain.

### **2.10 Waste**

The Suffolk Waste Partnership (SWP)<sup>15</sup>, of which both councils are members, is a strategic partnership of the county, district and borough councils, which works together to continuously improve waste management services throughout Suffolk. Both Councils are striving for a 60% recycling and composting rate across West Suffolk.

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<sup>14</sup> Local Government Association – National procurement Strategy – Future Direction - [http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/productivity/-/journal\\_content/56/10171/3671370/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE](http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/productivity/-/journal_content/56/10171/3671370/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE)

<sup>15</sup> Suffolk Waste Partnership - <http://www.greensuffolk.org/about/suffolk-waste-partnership/>

Across West Suffolk, we seek to minimise levels of waste generated and to manage waste in ways that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.

We continue to encourage the community to recycle as much as possible and to reduce the amount of waste it produces. We aim to achieve higher recycling levels and, together with waste minimisation initiatives, limit the amount of waste disposed of at landfill. We will also continue to encourage households in the locality through waste minimisation initiatives and providing reliable recycling infrastructure.

We also provide waste collection services to local businesses and other organisations and have developed the offer to include trade waste recycling including cardboard and mixed dry recyclable waste. We will continue to develop these services where we can and promote waste reduction, reuse and recycling to local businesses in West Suffolk.

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