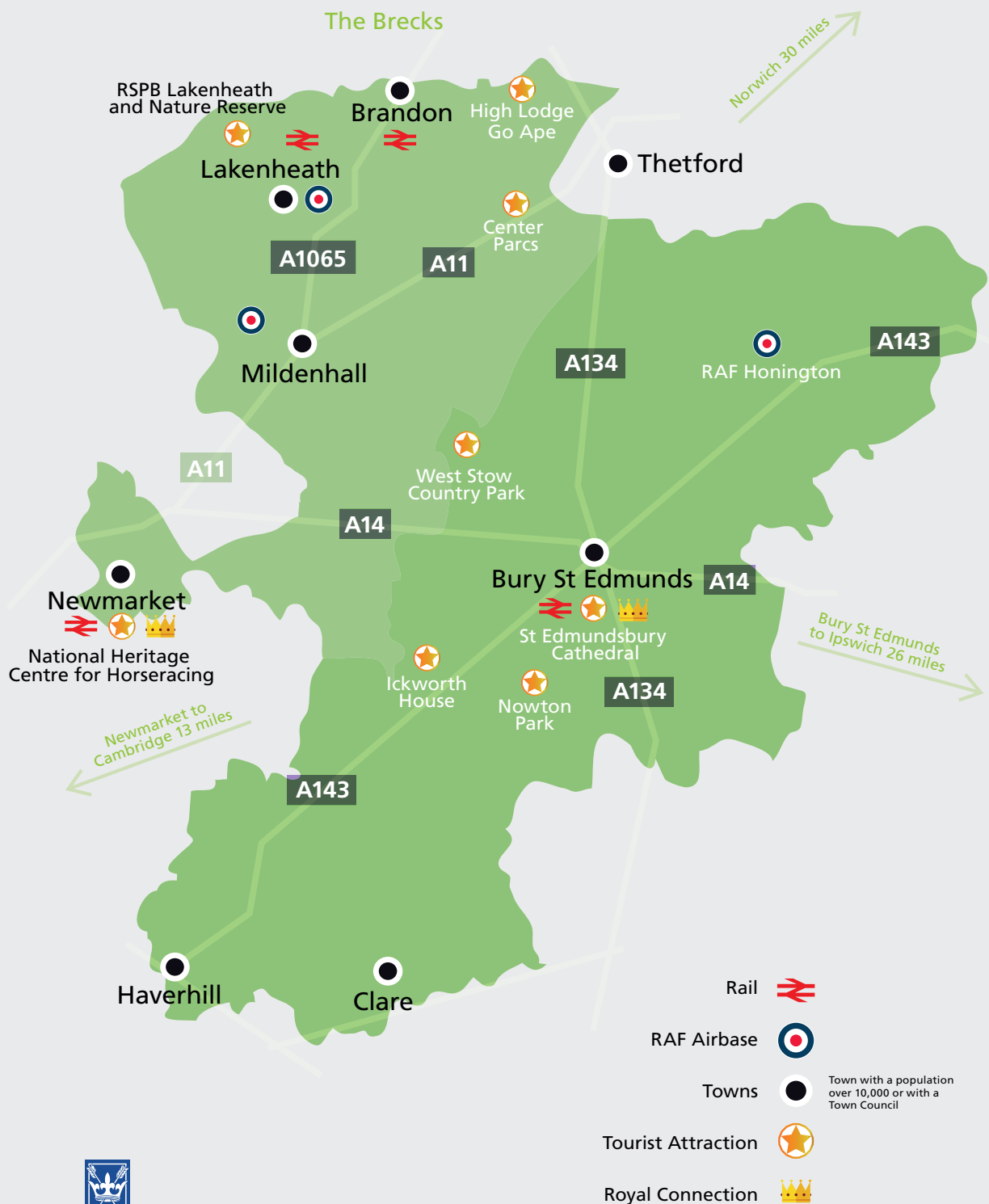


A new single council for West Suffolk

Driving prosperity and growth



Summary

Introduction

Both Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils are looking at the creation of a new single council for West Suffolk.

The aim would be to have a better ability than current arrangements to drive economic prosperity, deliver services and invest in our communities. At the same time a single council could better meet the challenges facing our communities, such as increased population, demand on health care and reduced funding.

A new council would entirely replace the borough and district council but continue to deliver the same services.

A business case has been drawn up which shows a new council would have great benefits for our communities and West Suffolk when compared to other options.

Both councils have already been successfully sharing services, for example collecting your bins or providing housing – saving £4 million every year. But with more demands on councils across England the business case for a new council for West Suffolk shows that doing nothing or going back to two councils would cost more and potentially reduce services.

In addition it is estimated a new council would deliver additional savings and efficiencies totalling around £800,000 a year. This allows for even more smarter working and will help to provide financial stability as well as protect the savings already made by the councils.

Whatever happens a review is due to take place this year anyway of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils' current ward boundaries

and number of councillors. The number of councillors for the new council and their role could be included in this.

Both councils have engaged with residents, organisations and partners so their views can help inform future discussions. The results of that can be found at www.westsuffolkcouncils/singlecouncil

What we want to achieve in West Suffolk

The proposal to create a new council for West Suffolk is shaped by both existing councils' commitment to:

- A strong and growing economy
- Strong families and communities
- Self-sufficient and resilient local government
- Using our commercial approach to invest back into our communities
- Efficient, effective services, offering value for money

What we believe a new single council will achieve:

According to our business case, a single council would allow us to better:

- Deliver services that are vital for our communities and businesses while at the same time driving forward an ambitious vision of growth, jobs and economic prosperity for our unique area.
- Future-proof for the next decade and beyond – to ensure a firm financial base and stability to meet the challenges faced by our communities such as improving health, the need for more homes and reduced national funding.
- Consolidate the savings and efficiencies we have made and make even more that can be reinvested to work with and benefit our communities.

The challenges we face

By 2020 Councils will no longer receive revenue grant from Government. This previously provided the majority of the budget for Councils. Authorities will rely mainly on funding from business rates, Council Tax and any other income they can generate.

Population is due to grow creating more demand on services.

By 2037, the working age population will be similar in size to the dependent population, with **5** dependent people (3 older people and 2 children) for every **5** people of working age.

Currently the ratio is **4.1** dependent people (1.8 children and 2.3 older people) for every **5.9** people of working age.

People are also living longer which also means more need for healthcare and supporting services such as appropriate housing.

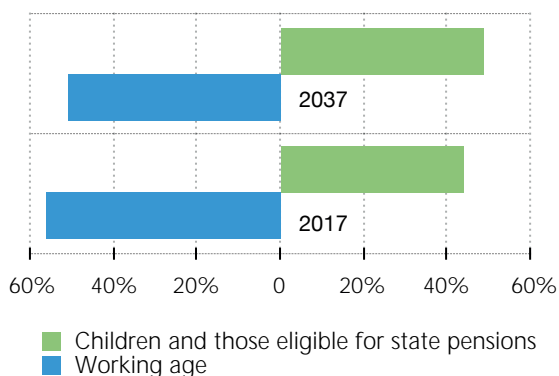
Challenges we face:

- Addressing affordability of housing (both to buy and rent)
- Finding new models of health and social care to address the current pressures
- Reduced central Government funding
- Managing growth
- Improving skills and qualification levels, in rural areas
- Increasing productivity
- Anticipating and seizing the opportunities of technological change

Providing homes

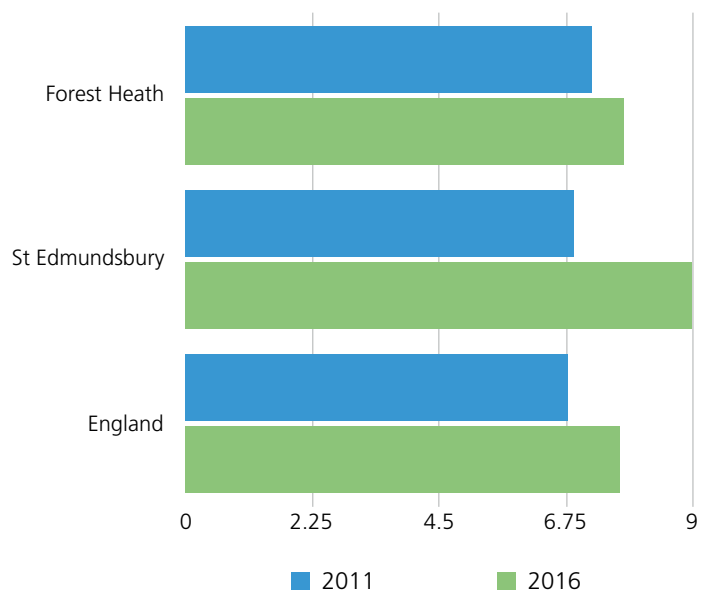
The affordability of housing is a challenge facing West Suffolk, with house prices between 7 and 9 times median incomes. These ratios have become higher in recent years, and are also higher than the national average. We need to continue to find new ways of increasing housing supply and ensuring housing is affordable for those who want to live and work in West Suffolk.

Percentage of West Suffolk population who are of working age vs those who are children or eligible for state pensions in West Suffolk – 2017 and 2037



Source: ONS sub-national population projections (2014)

Ratio of median income to median house prices 2011 and 2016 (ONS)



How a new council would meet those challenges

The business case demonstrates that a single council would bring real and lasting benefits to all residents in the area. A new single council would give the area a **greater ability** to:

- Be stronger and financially resilient to surpass the challenges of reduced public funding and any changes to local government.
- Be the right size to continue to represent and support our local villages, towns and communities but with a larger and stronger unified voice to more effectively lobby Government and attract internationally recognised businesses.
- Have a unified strategic vision for the whole area enabling us to be even more pro-active and able to capitalise on commercial opportunities.
- Continue the shared service working that has saved millions and build on this to deliver even better value and savings to invest back into high quality services and local community initiatives.
- Be better placed to offer extra support in many areas particularly working with communities to improve health and wellbeing.
- Have the leadership available to work more effectively with partners and others to manage increased growth, jobs and challenges that will drive the local economy and benefit our communities.
- Make sure we can provide more and the right kind of homes for our residents and cut unnecessary red tape for local businesses and traders.
- Keep the same overall boundaries as the Borough and District Council our communities call home while having the long term stability to deliver high quality services.



Why a new council?

We have looked at several options:

- do nothing
- revert to working as two separate councils (dismantle the shared service partnership)
- expand the shared service partnership to include other councils
- create a new, single district council for West Suffolk

Strong positive impact
 Weak positive impact
 Weak negative impact
 Strong negative impact



The table below shows how they scored:

Future form of local government in West Suffolk - options	Better local/public services	Significant cost savings	Greater value for money	Stronger and more accountable local leadership	Sustainability in the medium to long term
Do nothing	Poor financial stability and puts services at risk in medium term.	Lack of savings options as paying for two councils	Further savings unlikely on top of existing shared services savings.	More joint decisions could lead to reduced democratic accountability. Lack of opportunity to refresh leadership structures.	Risk of divergent agendas between two councils leading to financial vulnerability.
Revert to working as two separate councils (dismantle the shared service partnership)	Increased costs would place ongoing delivery of services at serious risk.	Increased costs from additional officers and lack of shared services.	Duplication of work would increase costs.	Traditional model of district council leadership.	Most vulnerable form of local government in the future. Small councils at high risk of failure
Expand the shared service partnership (to include additional new partners)	Could enhance service delivery. But complexity of extra arrangements could reduce speed and efficiency of service delivery.	Significant staff savings with minimal costs.	Could generate greater efficiencies but up to a point. Multiple agencies and distances would reduce efficiency and add cost.	More chance of reduced democratic accountability locally as shared decisions taken by varied partners.	Significant risk of divergent agendas between a wider number of partner councils
Create a single council for West Suffolk	New streamlined council benefits from economies of scale and strong financial position.	Transitional costs paid back in first year through further efficiencies. Need for harmonisation of council tax levels.	Most efficient for West Suffolk, achieving £800,000 in savings and efficiencies. Better opportunities to work more closely with wider public sector.	Opportunity for strong strategic leadership, strong partnerships and greater focus on locality based working alongside families and communities.	Most resilient form of local government in the future due to scale and ability to attract and manage growth and investment.

What the business case found

1. Value for money, financial savings and self-sufficiency

The detailed financial business case showed that a new single council would generate around £800,000 in savings and efficiencies a year. At the same time it would protect the £4 million in savings achieved through sharing services across West Suffolk. It would reduce some duplication and therefore mean more capacity to drive forward priorities such as growing the local economy and investing in supporting communities. Having one council would allow the authority to work even smarter and see savings in reduced processes and simplified contracts and arrangements. In the longer term, a single council would mean a bigger asset base to borrow against, without individual ring-fenced budgets and also be a stronger and more financially self-sufficient organisation.

2. Simplicity

Becoming a single council could be seen as a natural continuation of sharing services. It would remove the complexities of serving two bodies and therefore would be simpler to run and manage, especially when considering new delivery models.

One council gives business one contact for the area and allows the authority to work quickly and flexibly to seize commercial opportunities that benefit the whole area. Our communities already see us as one council and we would continue to keep buildings and facilities across the whole area, but the requirements for these would be simpler and more flexible. Simplifying would release staff capacity to allow increased focus on strategic priorities as well as key projects.

One council would make it simpler for us to play our part with public services and community groups in effectively meeting local aims and service delivery. Including working with partners to improve health and the economy.

3. Democratic accountability

No matter what happens the Local Government Boundary Commission for England is due to review anyway councillor numbers and boundaries for both councils. This gives the opportunity to shape councillor roles and boundaries. Residents would therefore benefit from a renewed democratic relationship with a new body and the opportunity of forging new relationships with communities. A single council would mean the retention of a democratically sound model but remove the current situation of a slow process for joint decisions. The concern is as time goes and the aims of both councils may change this would cause problems democratically as conflicts possible occur.

4. Influence

A new larger council, with a bigger population, local economy and GVA (Gross Value Added) would allow us more influence on the regional or national stage. A West Suffolk council would have a population of over 176,000 (using 2015 estimates), rising to 202,129 in 2039. This would bring the councils from being the 86th and 189th largest district councils in England (out of 202) to one of the top 10 largest district/ borough councils when combined – a big voice among our peers and central Government.

It would make it easier to work with and alongside other public services and devolved organisations, such as neighbouring combined authorities. The council would be small

enough to deliver local solutions designed with communities while large enough to make a real impact on improving the quality of life and health of our residents and families working with other agencies. Nationally Government wants to see larger and more resilient councils that can make decisions locally.

5. Resilience

A single council will be a more resilient organisation than two smaller councils in the future and therefore better able to face the significant changes and challenges that local government will experience in the remainder of this decade and into the next.

The current governance arrangements, which date back to 1974, while they have been fit for purpose so far, are likely to come under challenge in the longer term. This is especially true as local government funding changes in the future and threatens service delivery. A new single council is better equipped to deal with these changes and the challenges facing our communities.

