

Green Party Manifesto

Our key commitments to the people of Suffolk:

To commit to:

1. Transparent and accountable local government, including community budget setting for each council budget.
2. Public ownership, with clear accountability, of essential assets and services, especially those affecting the vulnerable and less well-off.
3. Giving priority in transport to buses, trains, cycling and walking, and introducing lower speed limits in residential areas and on rural roads.
4. Ensuring that all schools provide a high quality education, teachers are well supported, and parents are assured their children are transported safely to and from school.
5. Providing young people with the skills to succeed in the right environment and reducing the proportion of those not in employment, education or training.
6. Investing in local jobs and training amongst small businesses, particularly in home insulation and renewable power industries.
7. Giving communities the ability to own and improve their cultural assets such as parks, footpaths and public buildings.
8. Supporting a more localised food system which is resilient to global price fluctuations, by supporting local producers and encouraging communities to grow their own food.
9. A clean and safe environment, preserving and creating wildlife areas, saving energy and reducing non-recycled waste and carbon emissions

Our key campaigns:

- 20mph - a safe speed for where we live
- Local Food – healthy people, healthy environment, healthy economy

Suffolk Green Party comprises part of the Green Party of England and Wales. We subscribe to the party's vision.

The Green Party Vision

The Green Party aims to provide wellbeing and prosperity for all within the limits of our planet. A caring, cooperative and inclusive Green society would provide everyone with opportunities to do valuable work, pursue their interests, interact with their community, keep learning and enjoy nature. ⁱ

A. Democracy

Democratic accountability and subsidiarity are core Green Party principles; we believe in making decisions at the level closest to those they affect. For this reason we advocate:

- Truly local representation, with all councillors living or working in the areas they represent.
- All decisions by the county's cabinet subject to scrutiny led by members of the opposition rather than by the majority party.
- An annual process of community budget setting which is centred on towns and villages first, forming the basis of the council's annual budget.

We promise to consult fully before any changes are implemented to existing decision-making structures.

We note a decreasing level of trust in elected representatives, which is often manifested in low electoral turn-out, partly driven by a perceived lack of real choice. The Green Party has become the main challenger to Conservative control in parts of Suffolk, by offering forward-looking, radical ideas and active local representation. At this election we offer more voters than ever a real choice; the chance to vote for a really Green county. We will also seek to increase trust in our representative democracy by increasing opportunities for more direct public participation via open debate, real consultation and more access to the work of Suffolk County Council for interest groups.

The Green Party was not in favour of elected Police and Crime Commissioners. However now the elections have taken place we aim to work with the PCC to ensure local policing needs are met.

Legal aid has already been cut significantly under the current Government, which restricts the principle of justice for all. Whilst in employment law membership of a Union can bring access to justice and pursuit via employment tribunals, there are still many groups of people who have had their opportunity to seek justice through the legal system cut completely. We would advocate reinstating legal aid to redress this.

B. Social Care and Health

Over the past few years it has been clear that the County Council is intent on selling off social care facilities and outsourcing where it can. Recent national scandals only serve to illustrate how badly this can impact on the day to day lives of those in care and their friends and relations. The new Health and Well-being Strategy offers many opportunities to advance preventative measures and health promotion, which are at the core of Green Party policy.

- Promote healthy, locally-grown food (see **Food and Agriculture** below)
- Prioritise walking and cycling measures (see **Transport** below)
- Supplement the work of the Care Quality Commission by strengthening the involvement of elected councillors and the public in scrutinising local social care and health services
- Seek greater accountability and transparency in the decision making of the new GP consortia and Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Investigate frequently reported scandals in the care system, where lower standards of care have been indicated in the private sector.
- Increase the accountability of care home companies, which sometimes move ownership off-shore
- Seek to reverse the deeply concerning Care UK contract that risks a private, debt-ridden company lowering the quality of care for the sake of profit. Care UK shares the same business model as the collapsed Southern Cross company
- Campaign for early termination of the Serco takeover of community health services
- Continue to oppose PFI for all public provision in the county

Introduction of the new Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) is likely to put pressure on GPs to cut costs and restrict access to treatmentⁱⁱ and risks a reduction in care and referrals, especially for more expensive hospital procedures. to make their own decisions.

The Green Party believes in retaining the public ownership and running of public assets for the benefit of all. Which is also the most cost-effective approach. ⁱⁱⁱ

Creeping privatisation has become a galloping sell-off, while investing for the future has been supplanted by the unquantified liabilities of the Private Finance Initiative.

The 'choice' promised by privatisation is often a fallacy, especially for more expensive hospital procedures.

- Revoke funding for the Suffolk Circle project, which aims to provide a “good neighbour” service but currently has less than 500 members (ref SCC Scrutiny Committee 1 May 2012). The £380,000 funding for this scheme should be used to fund improvements to rural transport, specifically for elderly and vulnerable people that the Suffolk Circle scheme should be benefiting.

C. Transport

Transport is the only sector in which climate-altering carbon emissions are currently growing. We advocate the expansion of public transport and far better provision for walking and cycling - contributors to decarbonising our transport infrastructure. We also advocate prioritising public transport investment over road building, particularly encouraging a wider variety of bus scheduling, giving passengers more choice, as well as full consultation for any changes in public transport, and measures to increase road safety leading to fewer deaths on rural roads.

Speed Limits

In the interests of both safety and reducing emissions of CO₂, reduced traffic speeds are important. Suffolk Green Party has accordingly made residential 20mph zones a campaign priority. (See **Campaigns** below for details)

Buses

Suffolk Conservatives cut the subsidy for rural buses from £4 million in 2010/11 to £2.1 million in 2011/12, creating a spiral of decline in services. It halved the number of subsidised services and is now threatening more cuts. We will restore a virtuous circle with investment in regular routes, which generates more passengers and allows further investment.

- Use smaller buses on regular schedules to meet the needs of people travelling to school and work. We will channel the efforts of volunteers and the private sector into supplementing regular routes, rather than replacing scheduled services with dial-a-ride buses or “demand-responsive” services

We will campaign for a review of the PFI scheme in operation at Ipswich Hospital, which entails a projected £96m cost to the taxpayer to repay a capital investment by the contractor of only £36m.

- We would scrap wasteful planned new road building projects such as the Lowestoft Northern Spine Road (£8m cost), and use the cash to invest in buses. We would also look at diverting money from the road maintenance budget (roughly £40m a year)

Rail services

Green Party policy is to bring all rail services back into public ownership, ending the current state of disastrous fragmentation and profiteering.

- Passenger service improvements must continue, with better frequency and reliability as well as longer trains to accommodate rising passenger numbers
- Cross-over points must be reinstated to improve resilience of schedules in the event of break-down
- Implement feeder bus services between Diss and Stowmarket with eventual re-opening of stations to lessen car trips
- More investment should be made in freight capacity in order to switch containers from the county's roads to rail
- We support campaigners calling for a feasibility study into re-opening a rail link between Sudbury, Haverhill and Cambridge

Cycling

- We will introduce more cycle lanes on busy commuter roads within and between villages and towns, ensuring there are enough cycle lanes to provide a safe network
- Ensure cycle lanes connect, are segregated from traffic where possible, and that facilities are available for secure cycle storage at all bus interchanges and train stations
- Ensure that cyclists and pedestrians are prioritised when any changes to roads or traffic management are planned (advocating the Copenhagen model^v)
- Support the Suffolk Sustainable Transport Forum^{vi} in advising local businesses on transport emission reductions. This includes encouraging employers to extend and expand Cycle to Work schemes, including interest free loans for cycle purchase, mileage allowances and providing showering and changing facilities

We support the Ipswich Chord proposal^{iv} from Network Rail to develop better freight traffic management in the region by improving the Ipswich to Nuneaton line, allowing for the removal of 750,000 containers from the county's roads. Now approved by the Planning Inspectorate in September 2012, we endorse the start of the project and would encourage Network Rail to examine further possible improvements.

D. Education

Education is currently in crisis in Suffolk. Recent test results show that Suffolk's results for 7 to 11 year olds have dropped to the bottom three out of the nation's 150 education authorities. The drawn-out School Organisation Review has contributed to this and the problem has been exacerbated by the government and Conservative county council's encouragement of academy schools and 'free' schools. The Green Party has always believed in free education for all, provided by good, local, publicly owned schools. We believe that the potential to allow wealthy sponsors or narrow interest groups to shape the curriculum and influence admissions is not necessarily in the best interests of all pupils. These schools have taken education away from local democratic oversight and can undermine national standards in areas such as physical education and nutrition. They can also leave a 'local' school inaccessible to some groups of children where children from outside the area take up most of the places. We therefore advocate that:

- There should be clearer monitoring of schools' performance with funding and support applied to those that need to improve.
- All schools should be supported to be at least "good" as judged by school inspectors and we would encourage all to be maintained by the local authority.
- Local schools are consistently the best choice for parents, reducing concerns about choosing schools.
- Transport is free to designated schools (either the local school or the school where a place has been offered).
- Investment is provided into those schools still falling behind in the cash-starved "School Organisation Review" and staff, pupils and parents are clear about their school's future.
- Scrutiny of finances and decision-making by governing bodies where Academies have been created, specifically ensuring the curriculum is not influenced by private sponsors.
- Increased local accountability of Further Education colleges and University Campus should be increased
- All education sectors should include support for the re-skilling necessary for Transition to a low carbon future.

In cases where companies operating new Academies are clearly not having an impact due to their inexperience in running schools (for example in Holywells High School, now Ipswich Academy), these companies should have contracts withdrawn.

Funds paid by developers (known as Section 106 monies) have been allocated to education but simply not spent by Suffolk County Council.

E. Youth

The increase in tuition fees has taken university education out of the reach of many of Suffolk's young people. With University Campus Suffolk's fees rising to £8,000 a year, most graduates will be burdened with £25,000 to £50,000 of debt before entering the workplace. Without adequate provision of alternative vocational training, those not wishing to pursue university are finding their opportunities for securing gainful employment beyond school and college greatly reduced, especially in times of recession.

The Green Party wishes to support young people in Suffolk, giving them a louder voice and bringing down the numbers that are not in education, employment or training. We aim to do this by:

- Facilitating new apprenticeship schemes within the Green Economy, for example in macro and micro-renewable energy industries, waste and recycling sectors, insulation retrofitting industries, green construction and small-scale and organic agriculture
- Supplementing the election of youth parliament representatives by setting up a youth council to mirror the county council, giving young people a say in decision-making
- Developing stronger links between schools, further education institutions and workplaces to provide greater opportunities for young people as they move out of education and into work
- Continuing to encourage the council and its contractors to take on new apprentices
- Highlighting the need for an extra Further Education college in the centre of the county to improve access to education for students from rural areas
- Encouraging the work of existing third sector organisations, such as Young Suffolk, SAVO and Suffolk ACRE - this can strengthen the voluntary and community sectors and facilitate skills development amongst young people

Local Green Party councillors have initiated work to identify the barriers facing 18-24 year olds in their district, which they have found to include travel problems and the lack of a nearby Further Education college.

F. Economy

In contrast to the current Government's priority of lowering taxation and cutting spending on public services, the Green Party's economic policies are based on fair taxation and public spending at a level which ensures all citizens retain their rights to basic material security. This approach will deliver social equity and the redistribution of wealth to create a fairer society.

The relentless pursuit of economic growth for growth's sake is unsustainable. We need to make the county less dependent on imports, oil prices and the whims of multinationals and more based on Suffolk people's skills and our own resources. Rising oil and gas prices mean that the current policy of chasing economic growth by depending on the "Haven Gateway" of Felixstowe, Harwich and Ipswich is too much of a gamble. It is probable that the import and export of products will stabilise or decline. Rather than chasing growth for its own sake, we should therefore seek to make Suffolk's economy more resilient by following these objectives across the whole county:

- Create sustainable and worthwhile jobs, encouraging both new and existing small and medium size businesses, rather than trying to attract big multi-national corporations to Suffolk
- Make Suffolk's economy more resilient by weaning it off its dependence on fossil fuels. Encouraging small-scale, local businesses, supplied locally and serving local communities is one way of achieving this across many service areas, notably in food
- Advocate and encourage growth in environmentally sound industries such as renewable energy, insulation retrofitting, green construction, small-scale and organic agriculture, repair, recycling and other waste recovery techniques, and other green employment options in the conservation and environmental education sectors
- Challenge the inflated job claims for the proposed Sizewell C nuclear power station. (See **Energy** below) Energy efficiency and conservation, as well as renewable energy, will contribute to more genuinely local and long term jobs. We will encourage community-based companies to fund small scale renewable generation projects to reduce Suffolk's carbon emissions and ease demand on the national grid

Renewable jobs in East Anglia

East Anglia already leads the way in the biomass fuel industry, particularly in wood and pellets for wood burning stoves. We have more companies in that industry than any other region, employing 1,200 people. Wood-burning stoves use local people's skills and, through encouraging coppicing, ensure the sustainability of the county's many ancient woodlands and hedgerows. Wood stove use also promotes hedgerow trees and cuts dependency on the National Grid and fossil fuels is reduced along with carbon emissions and for hot water and heating. It also cuts fuel poverty eased. and carbon emissions. Across the East of England as a whole, the renewable industry already employs 7,730 people across 475 companies with a combined turnover of £1.02billion. The Renewable Energy Association, from whom these figures come, predicts that renewables, including wood burning stoves, solar panels and wind turbines are forecast to create 400,000 jobs across the UK by 2020 (2), with tens of thousands of those jobs in the East.

- Back the many people involved in small firms who seek a worthwhile livelihood rather than growth for growth's sake. Inward investment by big business can be counter-productive, since such companies aim to produce returns for remote shareholders rather than quality jobs for Suffolk
- Procure goods and services locally for council use
- Support residents in need of access to safe forms of saving and credit. We support the work of the cooperatively owned Ipswich and Suffolk Credit Union, which offers a wide range of services including interest free loans for green home improvements.

G. Cultural and leisure services

The Green Party believes the success of a society should be measured in terms of factors affecting people's quality of life, such as personal freedom, social equity, health and happiness, rather than narrow economic indicators. For this reason it is vital to protect cultural and leisure services in Suffolk, and:

- Support communities in their aims to provide local services, specifically with the Community Right to Bid (enshrined in the Localism Act) for local amenities that may otherwise be controlled by private bodies.
- Ensure county parks and other green spaces are assets controlled and used by communities for the benefit of local people.
- Provide the impetus for libraries to be developed as community spaces, run on appropriate budgets, and extended to the wider community and interest groups. The transfer of libraries to the new IPS in Suffolk is bringing grave concerns to library users, many of whom see this divestment as a first step towards libraries as a subscription rather than core public service. We advocate a return to Council management of libraries, with closer monitoring of the performance of the IPS in the interim, alongside retention of staffing budgets.
- Ensure that the new Suffolk Heritage Centre, incorporating the Suffolk Records Office, is situated in a location central to the county and easily accessible to individuals and organisations across the country.

In Ipswich we advocate revoking the cuts to Park Rangers and Wardens, which is leaving the town's parks under-resourced and remaining staff overstretched. Educational work and the provision of activities are restricted when staff must focus on basic park security and litter picking.

H. Environment

The Green Party holds ecological values at its core, weaving environmental elements into all national and local policies, to ensure that all public policy delivers sustainably. We believe it is a responsibility of any government to facilitate and empower everyone to lead more environmentally friendly lives, using progressive green taxation and investing in green industries. We believe that the government can act positively to create truly sustainable development, even in times of recession. Locally, we would advocate the following policies:

Waste

- Seek a zero waste strategy, which includes encouraging repair and re-use of materials, as well as traditional recycling. This would build on recognition that Suffolk is delivering recycling levels above the national average, at around 50% compared to a 43% national average in 2011^x. Whilst the county has aspirations for 60%, Greens advocate greater ambition.
- Rely less on incineration in the county, which can be avoided by investing in alternative technologies such as Mechanical and Biological Treatment (MBT) and anaerobic digestion. With high recycling rates, incineration plants not only become less viable economically, but bring the risk that recyclable materials are diverted to feed a large incinerator
- Work for a coherent waste strategy across the county, while recognising the excellent work on recycling being done by the Suffolk Waste Partnership, which we would like to see continue and increase

Energy

We would like to see greater co-working amongst all councils in Suffolk for energy efficiency and renewable and decentralised energy, as is currently the case with waste strategy. Demand reduction is the first step in filling the impending electricity gap, which will hit when many current power stations reach retirement. Reduction in demand on the National Grid can be achieved by implementing coherent and county-wide energy efficiency schemes.

If new recycling facilities are to be built, for example like those at the material recovery facility (MRF) at Great Blakenham, we would grant contracts to achieve the most up to date technology. We consider having clean MRFs is a bare minimum and would seek to use energy from waste technologies.

Where incineration projects cannot be halted, for example at Great Blakenham^{vii}, we would stipulate mandatory energy from waste recovery elements. Using combined heat and power procedures to recover and use waste heat can fuel secondary electricity generation or district heating systems. We support SITA's proposals to use the waste heat for greenhouses^{viii} at Great Blakenham for large scale vegetable production, as is currently done by British Sugar at their Bury factory^{ix}.

The Green Party is opposed to expansion of Nuclear Power, and in particular to any Sizewell C. Conservation, energy efficiency and renewables are all cheaper, safer and faster ways of closing a gap in electricity supply. They also create more jobs for local people.

We would:

- Start in-house with a focus on energy saving initiatives across all public services. The County Council has reduced its carbon emissions by around 2% per year, through reduction in use and offsetting using solar photo-voltaic (PV) installations on offices at Endeavour House and West Suffolk House^{xi}. To reach the target of 60% reduction by 2025 from a 2008 baseline, this reduction needs to increase to 3% a year. This can be achieved by retaining salaries for sustainability officers within council offices to deliver employee education, especially concerning transport emissions reduction and green driver training
- Continue to support the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership to deliver their wider community engagement work and energy audits for Suffolk businesses. We recommend reinstating funding for the Suffolk Energy Action Link consortium^{xii}, which brings district councils together on a quarterly basis to share ideas and best practice, as well as coordinating the delivery of district run home insulation schemes and providing energy advice to householders. We would advocate revoking the central government cuts to the regional East of England Energy Saving Trust Advice Centre, using funds via the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership
- Encourage community-led climate action schemes such as those being undertaken by Transition Towns. The council is missing a golden investment opportunity, as it could be borrowing to invest in wind turbines and solar power. Wind and solar projects have very little risk attached, and using just a small proportion of the land currently owned by the council for this purpose can provide both clean energy and guaranteed inflation-linked returns for ratepayers for 20 to 25 years. Preston and Bristol City councils are both investing in wind turbines

The Transition Movement has achieved a huge amount without any government funding. It needs support for skills development training. Transition (and similar) initiatives currently operating in Ipswich, Lavenham, Sudbury, Nayland, Stour Valley, Framlingham, Saxmundham, Woodbridge Stowmarket and Bungay need recognition and support from local councillors and, where possible, funding from locality and town budgets. District Council grant schemes should cater for these groups, many of which are not formally constituted. Flexibility would be welcome here to resource these grass-roots groups to do more.

Food and Agriculture

The supermarket-dominated food distribution network in the UK is based on transport by road using fossil fuels. We believe environmental, health and economic benefits can be achieved by re-localising our food system, linking local consumers to local producers and outlets, alongside encouraging more consumers to grow their own produce in allotments.

(See **Campaigns** below for details)

Biodiversity and conservation

Public green spaces are valuable for both the biodiversity within them and for their amenity use. We believe environmental protection should include preservation of habitats for the diversity of species that they support, as well as for human enjoyment. For this reason we would like to see:

- Every planning decision made by Suffolk County Council take into consideration whether there will be a loss or gain in the biodiversity of natural habitats. If there is a loss, it should also be considered whether that loss can be justified as demanded by new legislation (the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act)
- New planning policy that enshrines the protection of the biodiversity of natural habitats both on the land for development and while the development is taking place. This protection has been lost in recent changes to planning law within the National Planning Policy Framework
- District Councils across Suffolk employing ecologists^{xiv} to ensure that biodiversity considerations are catered for in decision making. We believe Suffolk should be leading the way in this, and will encourage retention of funding at county level, and availability of funding for such posts at district level

The Climate Change Partnership needs additional resources to take on provision of further advice. Its' Climate and Energy Helpline^{xiii} currently gives free, independent advice and information on energy efficiency, installing renewable energy technologies, and other ways to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change.

Campaign

20mph - a safe speed for where we live

Over 70% of drivers say 20mph is the right speed limit for residential streets^{xv}. Most children are injured not near schools but near their home on the way to or from school. The current voluntary “20s plenty” limits outside schools are inadequate and dangerous. We will therefore:

- Make it clear that 30mph limits on residential roads are not fit for purpose and phase in 20mph limits, starting with roads that already have voluntary “20s Plenty” zones
- Encourage and support towns and villages which want area-wide 20mph schemes
- Make cutting the number of deaths and injuries on the county’s roads a priority. With the county council taking responsibility for the costs of public health, investment in lower speed limits will pay for itself in the first year
- Phase in 40mph limits on all rural single carriageway roads, except where there are local objections
- Seek priority for speed enforcement in co-operation with the Police Commissioner
- Extend Community Speed Watch schemes which raise awareness amongst drivers of the impact of their speed

We will end the council’s embargo on new and extended 20mph and 30mph limits, because over 75% of people say 20mph is the right speed limit for residential streets.

Why 20mph?

This policy is recognised as “best practice” in places where there are pedestrians and cyclists, and where there are shops, workplaces or schools nearby. Children are better protected when 20mph limits surround nurseries, parks and play areas. Road casualties are proven to reduce by as much as 40% when area-wide 20mph limits are introduced. Quality of life and ‘liveability’ also improve, and drivers brake and change gear less often, saving fuel.

Suffolk County Council should strongly endorse the current Government proposal to reduce the default speed limit to 40mph on rural roads.

SERIOUS accidents on Britain’s B-roads are increasing, according to the latest figures from the Department for Transport (DfT), sparking criticism that the local authorities that look after them are not doing enough to protect rural drivers.

In the 12 months to September 2012 the number of fatal and serious accidents on minor roads was up 5% on the same period the previous year. Fatal accidents fell by 9% on motorways and A-roads. The rise in B-road accidents was partly responsible for an overall increase of 2% in serious or fatal crashes.

Road charities say the figures show not enough is done to protect B-road users: according to the Institute of Advanced Motorists, 1,021 vehicle occupants died on rural roads in the UK in 2010, compared with 92 on motorways and 305 on urban roads.

Our campaign on this issue draws on the evidence from the change of policy successfully achieved by Green Councillors on Norwich^{xvi} and Lancaster City Councils.

Campaign

Local Food – healthy people, healthy environment, healthy economy

Suffolk is already a major food producing county, but a greener focus on food can produce far more benefits for local people.

We will therefore:

- Seek to re-localise our food system, linking local consumers to local producers and outlets, providing local jobs,^{xvii} alongside encouraging more consumers to grow their own produce in allotments
- Increase access to allotments and food-growing programmes in all Suffolk parishes. This can be done by the council promoting and working in partnership with local food enablers, such as Suffolk ACRE's Local Foods Suffolk project^{xviii}, and the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners' regional representative^{xix}
- Ensure the County Council works with district and parish councils to defend statutory protection of allotments and, where demand is high, liaise with them to find and/or fund land for new allotments
- Use Suffolk's County Farms as showcases for local food production. This includes development of new Community Supported Agriculture schemes, educational and care farms. The health and therapeutic benefits of growing and working with livestock should be emphasised and capitalised on where opportunities arise
- Feature local food for council catering and events
- Encourage school allotments and orchards alongside cooking lessons at school for 11 to 14 year olds
- Call for more local produce in catering for the wider public sector - prisons, hospitals etc

The supermarket-dominated food distribution network in the UK is based on transport by road using fossil fuels.

The County Council is responsible for Trading Standards and needs to ensure these powers are fully utilised particularly in regard to sourcing local food and general nutritional food labelling.

References

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