



Parish *Bulletin*

Local Government
Review special
No. 2 - July 2008



Don't miss out on your chance to shape the future of Suffolk



Town and parish councils are being urged to make sure they have their say on the proposed future shape of local government in Suffolk following last week's shock announcement by the Boundary Committee for England (BCE).

After a whirlwind four month review of Suffolk (and Norfolk), the BCE revealed on July 7 what its preferred options were. These were:-

A unitary council covering Ipswich, Felixstowe, Kesgrave and 17 other parishes currently in Suffolk Coastal, as well as 19 in Babergh and seven in Mid Suffolk.

Combined with a unitary council covering the rest of Suffolk but excluding Lowestoft.

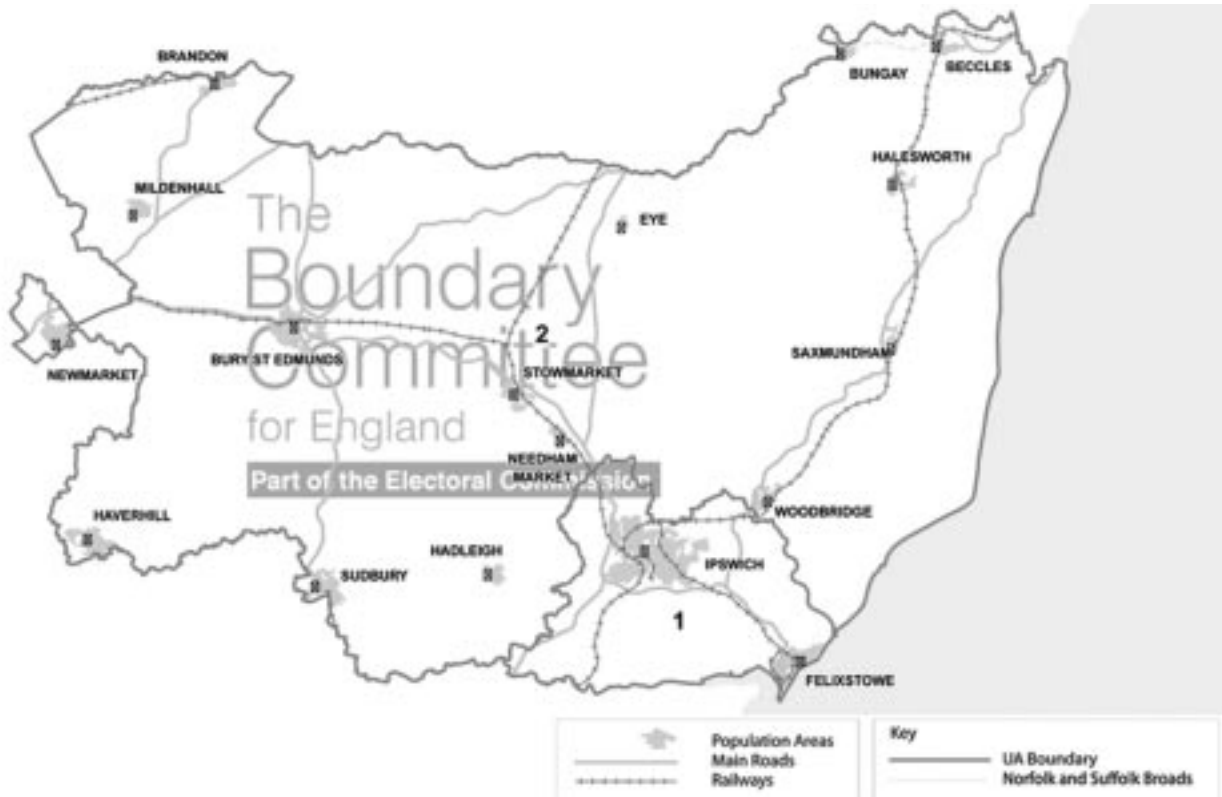
The BCE also offered up an alternative fall-back proposal if two unitaries proved unpopular of just one council covering all of Suffolk but again without Lowestoft which would become part of one council covering all of Norfolk.

The immediate response of Suffolk Coastal, and indeed most other councils, was one of shock at what the BCE has offered out to public consultation. In this latest special edition of Parish Bulletin, we will explain more about what details are available about the proposals, how you can respond, what our views are on the proposals, and exactly why we think that they are fatally flawed.

Draft proposals
The Boundary Committee for England



Draft proposals for unitary local government in Norfolk and Suffolk
July 2008



The new proposals in detail:-

The proposed unitary Ipswich, would include Felixstowe and Kesgrave and these other parishes of Suffolk Coastal - Brightwell, Martlesham, Bucklesham, Nacton, Falkenham, Newbourne, Playford, Foxhall, Purdis Farm, Great Bealings, Rushmere St Andrew, Hemley, Stratton Hall, Trimley St Martin, Kirton, Trimley St Mary, Levington, Waldringfield, and Little Bealings, as well as 19 parishes of Babergh, and seven in Mid Suffolk.

This would then be paired with a unitary council covering all the rest of Suffolk, but excluding Lowestoft which would be merged into one council covering all of Norfolk.

The consultation period

Having considered the representations received during the initial stage of the review, the Committee has published its draft proposal for unitary local government in Suffolk. This report can be accessed via our web page, www.electoralcommission.org.uk/boundary-reviews/all-reviews/eastern/suffolk/suffolk-structural-review.

“There will now be a period of 12 weeks, during which we welcome views on its draft proposal. Representations should be submitted to the Committee by September 26, 2008.

“The Committee has not finalised its proposal for a pattern of unitary local government in Suffolk. In the light of representations received, the Committee will review its draft proposal and consider whether it should be altered before submitting final advice to the Secretary of State.”

Archie Gall, Director of BCE

You can also send your responses to
Review Manager (Norfolk and Suffolk Reviews)
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

Or email them to reviews@boundarycommittee.org.uk

Or you can find out more by calling them on 0207 271 0512.

From September 26 to December 19, will be stage 4 of the Review, when the consultation responses, along with the affordability information provided by councils, will be considered by the Boundary Committee, who will provide its advice to the Secretary of State by December 31, who will allow four weeks for further representations before making a decision, probably in early February 2009.

Suffolk Coastal's reaction to the draft proposals



When the news broke about the Boundary Committee of England's (BCE) proposals for the reorganisation of local government in Suffolk, Suffolk Coastal's Leader reacted angrily, describing the process to date as a farce.

"This is a farcical situation whereby the BCE have ignored the solutions offered to them and are instead looking to impose something which has no understanding of the communities of Suffolk," said Cllr Ray Herring, Leader of Suffolk Coastal.

"In a very short time period, a range of interesting proposals for the future were offered, yet the BCE have come up with a solution for Ipswich based on a couple of maverick proposals and paired it with an option that nobody requested, with an alternative that again nobody wanted.

"This was a golden opportunity to provide better, more efficient services that engaged with and served local communities, but it has been squandered with a carve-up that has butchered our county and our districts. One option is unworkable while we have been given an alternative which is unthinkable. I note that the BCE's motto is that 'democracy counts'. Well it has not lived up to that claim so far but I can only hope for all our sakes that it will now listen to the voice of our communities," added Cllr Herring.

"Putting aside the annexation of Felixstowe, Kesgrave and 19 of our parishes for a moment, I find it impossible to fathom how the rest of Suffolk Coastal can best be served by becoming part of a massive council with 400,000 people.

"Looking at the criteria, I cannot see how creating one geographically massive new council will be locally accountable, while to date there has been absolutely no support for such a hare-brained idea.

"Our residents are used to receiving good, value for money services, and I honestly cannot see how creating one of the

country's biggest councils will continue to deliver that success," added Cllr Herring.

"At the root of this review was the Government's desire to achieve unitary status for Ipswich, but they have done it in a way that ignores logic and community ties. Our proposal would have seen Felixstowe in the same council as Lowestoft which made far more sense as they both face similar coastal defence and regeneration challenges. Now we have the ridiculous prospect of three different councils managing our county's coastal defences.

"The communities that make up Felixstowe now face the threat of becoming part of an aspiring city that needs to expand to achieve its goals, and with urban and social issues that are not those of a resort town.



"I am equally concerned about our communities between Felixstowe and Ipswich who have made it crystal clear that they do not want to be seen as some kind of Outer Ipswich. Their voice has been ignored so far, and what chance would they have to protect their largely rural lifestyles in a new unitary that will inevitably have urban regeneration as its biggest goal?

"The next part of the process is for the public and interested parties to have their say on the proposed options, and I would strongly urge everyone to put forward their views. I can only hope that they will pay more attention to our communities than they have to their representatives," added Cllr Herring.



What are other people saying about the draft proposals from the BCE?



John Gummer, Suffolk Coastal MP: "These proposals have no sense of place and do not provide a solution based on people's understanding of community. They have achieved the near impossible task of uniting all political parties to oppose the plans with one voice. The plans for two unitaries in Suffolk and a combined Norfolk and Lowestoft was unacceptable, as is the back-up plan of just one council delivering all local authority services. Large councils find it very difficult to focus on local issues. These proposals would bring about a serious democratic deficit if they are implemented.

"The BCE is not allowing members of the public to give their views on what seems to be the obvious plan - East Suffolk West Suffolk and an enlarged Ipswich. There is absolutely no support in Felixstowe to join in with Ipswich. Felixstowe does not feel part of Ipswich and Ipswich has nothing in common with Felixstowe."

Chris Mole, Ipswich MP, speaking after a meeting of MPs from Suffolk and Norfolk: "The general view of the meeting was that there was no value in the BCE consulting with the public on plans which were going nowhere. The Boundary Committee has got hooked on its own academic view of what should happen in the two counties and has not understood the strength of community felt by residents."



St Edmundsbury Borough Council Leader, Cllr John Griffiths, said: "We are extremely surprised by this recommendation which if implemented, would seem to ignore the feelings of our local residents and does not present a solution for West Suffolk. This recommendation appears to take no account of people's sense of place in their own community. We have always argued for local people making local decisions."



Cllr Nick Webb, of Waveney Council said: "Nobody requested this, nobody recommended it. It's the worst of all worlds and makes a mockery of the whole process. A fudge that asks more questions than it answers."



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Cllr Mark Bee, Leader of Waveney Council said: "A whole range of options and ideas were put to the BCE by people who understand Suffolk, understand Waveney and understand how services should be delivered to these communities.

"And yet, the BCE have ignored everything we have told them to produce a messy nonsense that will only deliver confusion and which has no feel whatsoever for the natural, different areas of Suffolk and Norfolk."



Forest Heath District Council leader, Cllr Geoffrey Jaggard, said "This does not appear to be a good solution for the people in West Suffolk or for local democracy," said Cllr Jaggard. "We believe that a large unitary council, covering Forest Heath, St Edmundsbury, Babergh, Mid Suffolk and parts of

Waveney and Suffolk Coastal, would be cumbersome and remote from people and places which is why we argued for smaller scale unitary councils, or status quo. We believe it is important for councils to be able to focus on all the different issues and identities."



Councillor Tim Passmore, Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council, said, "I am very pleased that our joint bid is one of the two options being consulted upon. I believe 'One Suffolk' offers the best chance of reducing council tax, and provides the strongest voice for Suffolk - and a stronger voice means more clout with central government, and more money coming in to Suffolk to improve services for local people".



Councillor Jeremy Pembroke, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said, "Our 'One Suffolk' is the cheapest solution - it would save the equivalent of £100 for every household in Suffolk. I remain convinced that a unitary Suffolk - one council for the county - would benefit the people of Suffolk."

Why we are saying 'no' to the BCE proposals and 'yes' to East Suffolk and two other unitaries

What has gone out to public consultation is the BCE's draft proposals - as the BCE says, it has not finalised its proposals, it will listen to public views and it is prepared to alter them before submitting them to the Government.

It is therefore not a case of looking at the proposals that the BCE has put on the table and having to decide which one you prefer - this is not a choice between the frying pan or the fire! You can decide that neither is the right solution for your community and say what you think is the right way forward for local government

in Suffolk.

This Council will be saying no to the BCE proposals and continuing to argue that the best way to provide better services and even better value is to create an East Suffolk Council that will be locally accountable and strategically powerful, backed up with unitary councils in West Suffolk and Ipswich.

Over the next two pages we will explain why we think that is the best way forward for all the communities not just of this district, but for Suffolk as a whole.

What is wrong with merging Ipswich, Felixstowe and Kesgrave?

We recognise the pressure on the BCE to create an Ipswich unitary council, and we support Ipswich in its aspirations to stand alone from the rest of Suffolk, as it has also strongly supported the need for East and West Suffolk councils.



Ipswich has made no secret of the fact that it is an aspiring city and it faces a range of regeneration and social issues that is like no other part of Suffolk. While both Ipswich and Felixstowe both have a port, one is the busiest in the country dwarfing what goes on in Ipswich. A cursory look at both towns show that there is little that binds them together. Felixstowe is a resort town with its own challenges that are being addressed but which are very different and of a much smaller scale than those facing Ipswich.

The East Suffolk proposal would see Felixstowe being linked firmly with Lowestoft, a town which it shares far more with than Ipswich. It would allow the two of them to work together where appropriate, to tackle their local needs and challenges, while being part of an East Suffolk Council that would work together to tackle the vital coastal defence issues that have to be faced and would be best faced by one council, rather than three as the BCE is proposing!

It is hard to see where Kesgrave and the 19 rural parishes could possibly fit into this proposed council area. Already there are local fears about what guarantees are there that would prevent the disappearance under concrete of much of those areas if they were being controlled by urban rather than rural councillors.

What would be wrong with a rural Suffolkwide council?

Along with an Ipswich, Felixstowe and Kesgrave unitary, the BCE is proposing creating a second unitary council covering the rest of Suffolk, but without Lowestoft. This would cover nearly 750,000 acres and around 400,000 people. Quite simply, we believe that this is too big a council to meet local needs. How can one council covering around 85 per cent of the area of the county be truly accountable or local. There is a real danger it will be like a regional government.



It is difficult to know how it could work because nobody suggested it - there has been no work done to justify it or explain how it could serve all the many communities. We are also strongly against the proposed exclusion of Lowestoft - it is part of Suffolk now and should remain part of Suffolk's future, unless its residents think otherwise and there are absolutely no signs that they do.

So what is wrong with just one giant council for all of Suffolk?

Suffolk County Council and Mid Suffolk are pressing for the BCE's fall back proposal of one council covering all of Suffolk, but from their initial statements appear to have accepted losing Lowestoft to Norfolk, a move which this Council completely rejects. Lowestoft should remain part of Suffolk unless it wants to leave, not because of a whim of the BCE.

We cannot support the idea of creating one council potentially trying to serve the needs of up to 750,000 people across an area as big as 950,000 acres. We do not believe that important decisions on issues such as planning can or should be made by that large a council. We do not believe that one council could juggle all the different needs of the different communities - there has been no evidence that it could balance the requirements of urban Ipswich with those of market towns and rural villages, or the coastal communities with those who look west towards Cambridge.

There are a whole range of services where a local perspective is vital, which we think that having three reasonably sized unitaries all serving areas with common interests and needs can achieve. How could planning policies be created that would shape the way planning decisions could be made?

The communities across Ipswich, East and West Suffolk have different needs, they face different challenges, they have different aspirations. The communities across Ipswich, East and West Suffolk have different needs, they face different challenges, they have different aspirations.

Three local councils with a local voice, and a local knowledge and understanding can deliver what local people need and want in a way that one giant council will always struggle to achieve.

But won't a rural suffolkwide or the one suffolk council be cheaper?

A major driving force behind the Government's wish to have unitary councils is about value for money. Whatever form of unitary style of local government is given the go-ahead in Suffolk it must be cheaper or else it will not be approved. There will be inevitable efficiencies - three unitary councils will mean only three chief executives, with similar trimming happening across all the top levels of management.

What we do not want to put at risk though is the quality of services - because East Suffolk would be a local council it would mean that local people with local knowledge will be making the decisions about what services are needed and where, decisions that will be shaped by what local communities say and want. We know that the goal is not just to pro-

vide cheaper services, but better services that meet the changing needs of all our different communities.

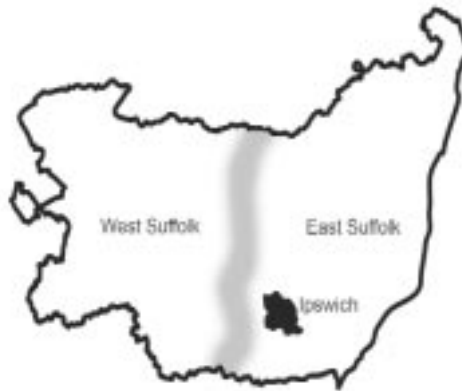
Wouldn't the proposal of one council without Felixstowe and Ipswich mean a better deal for the parishes?

We think it would be unfair on Felixstowe and Lowestoft to be uprooted from their natural areas and lumped in with Ipswich and Norfolk respectively. However the loss of those two towns and of Ipswich should not be a reason for some secret celebrations by the remaining parishes.

The proposed rural Suffolk council would be a relatively weak organisation, with all its economic drivers based in other council areas. As a rural area, it is unlikely to be favourably treated by the Government when it comes to the grants or share of business rates which make up the bulk of a Council's income.

While it could be said to be a partnership of equals, they would all be equally small, with the danger of it having a weak voice on a regional and national stage.

The budget that it does have is likely to struggle to meet the differing needs and priorities of the communities spread across its 700,000 acres or so. In reality, there is more that divides the communities of Aldeburgh and Mildenhall or Woodbridge and Haverill than unites them. The geographical spread of the new council would only add to the strains of trying to meet the social needs and priorities of the East and West of Suffolk.



But won't we have a bigger say in either the two new councils or even the one council proposals?

We fear that the independent voice of Felixstowe would be drowned in the new Ipswich council, and there would be no chance of being listened to for one of the 19 parishes, while there would be hundreds of parishes in either the rural or the giant one suffolk proposal. To be fair, every option is promising to give more say to their local communi-

ties, because that is one of criteria that the new unitary councils must meet. We believe that this Council has shown that it can properly involve local communities, and that we are building on our lessons and experience to offer something with real opportunities for towns and parishes to be involved in our East Suffolk proposal.

We believe that the best way to have a real say is within a unitary that is big enough to work, small enough to listen, that has shared interests and needs. The three unitaries of East, West and Ipswich would deliver that - all the other options would not benefit as many of the communities of Suffolk as our proposal would.

One Suffolk - the case for and against

In response to the BCE draft proposals being published, Mid Suffolk District Council and Suffolk County Council issued a press release, parts of which are included on page 4. The press release also included a summary of why they thought their One Suffolk proposals was the best option and should be supported. On this page we list the points they made, and Cllr Ray Herring, Suffolk Coastal's Leader gives his views on their claims. According to Mid Suffolk and the County Council on July 7, the key aspects of the One Suffolk option are shown below in italics. Cllr Herring's, responses are shown beneath each point in quotes.

Cheapest - the most affordable option. One council will save the equivalent of £100 per household in Suffolk.

“There is nothing to prove this claim. A new unitary council has to be cheaper, better value for money, or it will not get the official go-ahead. All of the options will be cheaper, and any of us could pluck a £100 figure out of the air.”

◆ ◆ ◆
Easiest - wherever you live in Suffolk, all services will be provided by the same council. So whether you need to report a pot hole, get your street lamp fixed, or pay your council tax, there will be just one number to ring. Simple.

“The reason for suggesting one phone number is because the County Council and Mid Suffolk are contractually tied to supply Customer Services Direct, which offers a centralised call centre approach to all their residents. Other councils prefer to offer a better, more human, more local service.”

◆ ◆ ◆
Closest - one council brings power to your town or village. You and your neighbours will decide together what is best for your town or village. You decide how many hours you need the library open or whether to charge for car parking. You can decide what additional recycling you want to do.

“While each community may well be able to make ‘decisions’ the reality is that the policies and budgets that will control those decisions will be made centrally. We believe that by having three unitaries, the power to decide local priorities and budgets can be made by local communities with shared interests, not by councillors fighting over the different needs of over 700,000 people.”

◆ ◆ ◆
Real power moves down to the very local level.

“This is just a cheap slogan. Real power is having control over the size of your budget and the policies that decide the priorities of your budget. Communities in our district would have to fight their corner against the very different needs of Ipswich or of West Suffolk. Creating three unitary councils made up of communities with similar needs would actually give real meaning to passing power down to local communities which all the proposed unitary councils are committed to doing.”

◆ ◆ ◆
It would also:

Be a brand new council: not an extended county council

“I hope that this is a recognition that people are increasingly feeling that the County Council is isolated and cut off from the communities it is meant to be serving. To make that cultural change a reality, three unitary councils is the best solution.”

◆ ◆ ◆
Become the strongest voice for Suffolk. A single voice for Suffolk means more clout with central government and more money coming into Suffolk to tackle our problems (e.g. coastal erosion and road maintenance)

“We want a strong voice for East Suffolk - we recognise that our needs and priorities are going to be different sometimes from Ipswich or West Suffolk. It will be even more powerful when three councils unite behind one cause that affects all the county.”

◆ ◆ ◆
Ensure rural areas will get more money to spend locally as the larger council has the scope to prioritise key issues when residents demand it.

“Having one giant Suffolk council will mean that the rural areas will be fighting against Ipswich for funding and priorities. Three councils can deliver this claim for rural areas - one giant one cannot.”

◆ ◆ ◆
Help Urban areas to stay very much in control of their town through the proposed local boards. One Suffolk will be able to reduce inequalities by balancing funding across the whole county. Everyone can use the same high quality services no matter where they live.

“This statement highlights the problem facing one giant council - how can it balance the needs of East or West Suffolk compared to Ipswich. Why should the same services be on offer everywhere - the scale of Ipswich's social problems are completely different from the rest of the county.”

◆ ◆ ◆
Be the safest option: One Suffolk can make sure nothing is lost as it falls between different areas.

“The statement issued talked about the One Suffolk concept being accepted by the Boundary Committee and being put out for consultation. The fact that the consultation will be on a ‘One Suffolk’ concept that has already has lost Lowestoft is not even mentioned! What else will be lost?”

A reminder of the case for East Suffolk

The concept that Suffolk Coastal and Waveney submitted was for three new unitaries to be created - East Suffolk, West Suffolk and Ipswich. We believed that this is the best solution because

- ◆ it is big enough to be economic and efficient yet still small enough to relate to and work effectively with its local communities
- ◆ it will enable local communities to influence decisions and feel part of the decision that affect their lives
- ◆ it is of a scale that can represent effectively the interests of East Suffolk at regional and national level
- ◆ it is big enough to work effectively with business interests at a local and national level

We believed that each of the three suggested unitary authorities can achieve the factors above to meet local needs whilst having sufficient influence to drive forward strategic interests and to engage on a regional and national level on issues that affect our communities' quality of life.

We also believe that each of these three areas have distinct identities and face specific challenges and issues both now and in the future. The rules of the Review are that calling for no change to the current system is not an option.

We do not support a Yarftoft unitary that combines Great Yarmouth with Lowestoft and Waveney as we believe that this does not reflect communities of interest, or best meet their future needs.

We do not support one unitary for the whole of Suffolk as we believe that one single council for the whole county would be a large remote organisation not able to effectively engage with the various and diverse needs of the local communities with a population of nearly 700,000 and an area of 952,247 acres.

The case for an East Suffolk unitary

East Suffolk consists of communities with shared interests, life styles and concerns. These include environmental, economic development, port / resort regeneration and the quality of life. The management and protection of the coast and the countryside is a high priority across the area, both to encourage tourism and maintain the quality of life of residents

The East of Suffolk area takes in market towns, coastal resorts, small villages and urban centres, with a total population figure of approximately 250,000.

East Suffolk's key industries are logistics / distribution, communications / information technology, and tourism, with an above average level of manufacturing in the north. Its main employment areas are in Lowestoft and Felixstowe, while most of the market towns have a very localised employment zone. Market towns provide day-to-day services and shopping, while residents look to Norwich and Ipswich for high-level services.

East Suffolk - some of the themes that unite us and make us unique

- ◆ Management of coastal areas.
- ◆ The management of the countryside is a prime focus for the area, but this will be affected by climate change and the increased risk of flooding and erosion along coasts and estuaries. Most of the Suffolk coastline is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and contains many areas of Special Scientific Interest.
- ◆ Regeneration of the two main urban centres: Lowestoft and Felixstowe.
- ◆ There are issues around unemployment (particularly in the north, but with pockets throughout the area) and skills (lack of qualifications is a greater issue in the south east).
- ◆ Business clustering - energy (renewable energy, nuclear energy, and energy management enterprises), logistics (focussed on the Port of Felixstowe) and information technology / communications.
- ◆ Above average levels of people with no qualifications.
- ◆ Deprivation is found throughout rural areas, market towns as well as Felixstowe and Lowestoft.
- ◆ Achievement rates for 16-18 year olds (proportion of students completing their course) are below average for England and Wales.
- ◆ East Suffolk includes important urban centres, a network of market towns, and sparsely populated rural areas.
- ◆ Access to services is a concern for many - there's a need to deliver services locally, encouraging transport links to larger centres, and managing increasing volume of traffic to retain the area's unique and attractive characteristics.
- ◆ Levels of deprivation may be concealed in rural areas, and some of the most and least deprived rural areas in the East of England are within the proposed authority .
- ◆ House prices and communities are impacted by second home ownership and people retiring to the area, and there is a shared recognition of the need to increase access to housing to meet local needs.
- ◆ The level and location of social care and other services are affected by the high proportion of elderly residents. This is a significant employment area for both the East and Ipswich areas.
- ◆ The level of crime across East Suffolk is well below the national average, with some of the areas among the safest in the country.
- ◆ Beach quality is recognised, with Felixstowe and Lowestoft both holding the internationally-recognised Blue Flag award.