



Parish Bulletin

Local Government
Review special
No. 1 - April 2008



Changing the shape of Suffolk?

In our Spring edition of Parish Bulletin, we highlighted the background to the Local Government Review based on the information available to us at that time. We promised to keep you as informed as possible about developments and this Parish Bulletin LGR special brings you up to date as at April 4.

See inside for:-

- ◆ details of the timetable,
- ◆ details of the options, with a focus on the East Suffolk concept, and
- ◆ how town and parishes can have their input on these vital discussions.



The terms of reference

The Government's terms of reference ask the Boundary Committee to consider whether there is an alternative unitary structure to that proposed in the original Ipswich bid for unitary status that meets the following five criteria:

- **Affordability**
- **Cross section of support**
- **Strategic leadership**
- **Neighbourhood empowerment**
- **Value for money**

Apart from considering whether there could be an alternative proposal for a single tier of local government, for the whole or part of Suffolk, the Boundary Committee must also consider the potential for cross border options involving the whole or a part of Great Yarmouth - the so-called Yartoft option.

Key local factors likely to influence the Review

- **Sense of Place** - the unique characteristics that make an area (or part of an area) special
- **Communities of Interest** - communities that have mutual interest or things in common, eg coastal communities
- **Neighbourhood Empowerment** - local people influencing decisions that affect their lives, including the ability to shape service provision; engaging all sections of the community; clear and accountable community engagement arrangements which empower the frontline Councillors to champion their community.

The timetable for the review of Suffolk

Stage One March 3- April 11

Concepts for new unitary authorities relating to five criteria.

Stage Two April 14 - July 4

Boundary Committee considers concepts and seeks information from local authorities and other stakeholders

Draft proposals published - July 7

Stage Three July 7 - September 26

Consultation on draft proposals, including boundaries. Affordability information provided by local authorities.

Stage Four September 26 - December 19

Stage three information considered by Boundary Committee. Further information requested as necessary.

Advice provided to Secretary of State

The Secretary of State will allow four weeks for direct representation after she has received the recommended alternatives from the Boundary Committee. She will then make her decision - probably in **early February, 2009**. She can choose to accept the Boundary Committee's advice, or can ask for more information, or can reject the advice and leave things exactly as they are.

In terms of the timetable beyond 2008 it is assumed that the agreed option will then be implemented, with any new unitaries taking effect from **April 1, 2010**

Stage 1 - getting the concepts right

Drawing up the concepts

The first part of the process is to develop high level **concepts** for potential new unitary authorities using the criteria referred to on page 1.

There are a number of key principles that Suffolk Coastal believes should guide the consideration of any unitary structures in Suffolk:

- The new authority should be large enough to be economic and efficient, yet small and local enough to relate to and work with local communities. It should thereby be able to deliver effective strategic leadership.
- We should be designing for the long-term future delivery of efficient, locally provided and run services, not just for now.
- Enable decision-making for local people by local people with a significant role for Town and Parish Councils.
- Be committed to working effectively in partnership with other local authorities and agencies, such as on commissioning and delivery of services.
- Be big enough to work effectively at the regional and national level.
- Be able to work effectively with business and the private sector, both locally and nationally.
- Have sufficient scale to respond to current and future challenges

- Recognise that there are economies, and dis-economies of scale.
- Communicate effectively with communities and partners.

Some of the concepts so far

The Suffolk Leaders/Chief Executives agreed the following concepts should be put forward to the Boundary Committee for consideration:

- ◆ Unitary Suffolk
- ◆ Ipswich and Suffolk unitaries (the 'doughnut' option)
- ◆ East/West Suffolk unitaries
- ◆ Ipswich plus East/West Suffolk unitaries

The County Council at its March 27 meeting, considered all of the above options, plus three others listed below, before agreeing to proceed with a single unitary for all of Suffolk concept

- ◆ an all or part of Great Yarmouth/all or part of Waveney unitary and a rest of Suffolk unitary
- ◆ an Ipswich unitary, an all or part of Great Yarmouth/all or part of Waveney unitary, and rest of Suffolk unitary
- ◆ an Ipswich unitary, an all or part of Great Yarmouth/all or part of Waveney unitary, an East Suffolk unitary, and a West Suffolk unitary.

The East Suffolk Concept

The concept that Suffolk Coastal is working on is an East Suffolk, West Suffolk and an Ipswich unitary on existing boundaries.

We believe 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 believe 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 - the Boundary Committee can only consider concepts that propose new unitary councils.

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.

Town and Parish Councils have a key role to play in the future and we will be involving you heavily in the process as this review continues. We are holding parish liaison meetings, with the next ones planned for April 21 (central/south west) and 28 (north). At our meeting with 10 of the southern parishes on March 26 there was no enthusiasm for an extension of Ipswich's boundary into our district.

Boundaries

It must be emphasised that boundaries still need to be clearly defined. The primary boundary issues are:

Does Ipswich extend its boundaries to include neighbouring towns and villages?

- What is the benefit for doing so for the neighbouring towns and villages?
- Are there distinct difference between Ipswich and the neighbouring towns and villages?
- What evidence is there that there is a stronger relationship for those town and villages towards Ipswich than East Suffolk?

If Ipswich extends its boundaries, where is the natural fit for the Shotley Peninsula?

- East Suffolk?
- West Suffolk ?
- Ipswich?

East Suffolk - some of the themes that unite us

There a range of shared themes that bring together the communities of East Suffolk, including environment, economic development and quality of life issues.

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Some of the highest levels of satisfaction with quality of life among residents are found in much of East Suffolk and there is a commitment to raise those levels across the board.
- ◆ The level of crime across East Suffolk is well below the national average, with some of the areas among the safest in the country.
- ◆ The quality of beaches and their management is recognised, with both Felixstowe and Lowestoft being holders of the internationally-recognised Blue Flag award.

Participation in the Review Process by Town/Parish Councils

Town and Parish Councils can make their views known directly to the Boundary Committee, who have made it clear that they would prefer to receive evidence to back up the case being made, rather than petitions. The contact details are as follows:

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Further information is available from the Boundary Committee website - www.boundarycommittee.org.uk

For further information about Suffolk Coastal's approach to the Review Process please contact the Local Government Review Project Team at:

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www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk/yourcouncil/future

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