County Councillors Report {September)

Suffolk residents can get a free proposal to replace ageing heating systems with heat pumps, and access a government grant for installation

All of Suffolk's public sector organisations (including all of Suffolk's local councils) have come together to help residents in Suffolk replace ageing gas, oil or LPG boilers with a heat pump, combining a £7,500 or £9,000 government grant, depending on current heating fuel, with group-buying savings on installation.

Over the past few years, energy bills have been unpredictable, serving as a reminder of just how exposed household budgets can be to forces entirely outside our control. But now, Suffolk's public sector organisations are partnering with Switch Together, a community group-buying scheme, to help residents in Suffolk move away from ageing and inefficient heating systems.

Through the government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme, eligible homeowners in England can receive a grant of £7,500 toward an air source heat pump, or £9,000 for households currently heating with oil or LPG. The grant is applied for upfront by the installer, so residents do not need to claim it back or repay it.

The Boiler Upgrade Scheme is open to homeowners and small business owners in England who are replacing a fossil fuel heating system and hold a valid Energy Performance Certificate with no outstanding major insulation recommendations. It is not means-tested, so there is no income threshold to qualify. The scheme is currently scheduled to run until 31 December 2027.

Switch Together works by bringing residents together so that installers compete to win their business, securing better installation prices than most homeowners could negotiate alone. Once registered, residents receive a free, no-obligation personal offer, and their installer handles the grant application on their behalf. Switch Together's group-buying savings apply on top of the government grant.

Every installation is carried out by a Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) accredited installer. Switch Together works only with MCS-accredited professionals, so residents are covered from the first quote to the finished installation.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Chair of the Suffolk Councils' Environment Portfolio Holders' Group, said:
"This is a fantastic opportunity for Suffolk residents to explore a cleaner, more efficient and cheaper way of heating their homes. Through our partnership with Switch Together, homeowners can access trusted installers, exclusive group-buying savings and government grants worth up to £9,000, making heat pumps more affordable than ever.

"Registration is free and comes with no obligation, so I'd encourage anyone thinking about replacing an ageing heating system to sign up and see what's possible. Together, we're helping residents save money, reduce emissions and create a more sustainable Suffolk."

The grant amount: £7,500 for households currently heating with gas or electricity, or £9,000 for households currently heating with oil or LPG. Switch Together's scheme covers air-to-water air source heat pumps, which provide both central heating and hot water.

Why an air source heat pump: they typically use three to four times less energy than a traditional boiler to heat a home, which can help lower bills over time. They spread heat evenly through the property, keeping every room at a steady, comfortable temperature even when it's cold outside. And because they don't burn fuel on site, they produce fewer emissions than a gas, oil or LPG boiler, for a cleaner, more sustainable home.

How Switch Together works: residents register free, with no obligation; Switch Together matches them with a trusted, MCS-accredited installer and a personal offer; and, if the resident chooses to go ahead, carry out the installation. Residents of Suffolk can check their eligibility and register their interest on the Switch Together website.

This scheme is brought to you by Suffolk's public sector organisations as part of their work to create a more sustainable Suffolk.
Find out more about Sustainable Suffolk and their projects at www.sustainablesuffolk.org.uk

Energy Efficiency Loans

Homeowners across Suffolk can now apply for a loan to help fund energy efficiency improvements to their homes, thanks to a partnership between Suffolk County Council and Lendology. The Warm Homes Suffolk Loan scheme offers eligible homeowners access to loans from £2k to £15k at a fixed interest rate of 2.2% Annual Percentage Rate (APR), with repayment terms of up to seven years. Borrowers may also repay their loan early without penalty, subject to eligibility and loan terms. The funding is designed to support residents who want to improve the energy performance of their homes while spreading the cost of installation over a manageable period.

The loan can be used for a range of energy efficiency measures, including:

- Solar photovoltaic (PV) systems
- Solar battery storage
- Solar thermal systems
- Ground source heat pumps
- Air source heat pumps
- Double and triple glazed windows and doors

- Loft, wall and floor insulation
- Ventilation systems when installed alongside insulation measures

The scheme aims to help residents reduce their energy bills and make their homes better insulated. For more information about the Warm Homes Suffolk Loan Scheme, please visit the Lendology website: https://www.lendology.org.uk/partner/suffolk-council/

High Streets Matter: Support for Market Towns

Suffolk County Council is offering extra support to small independent and hospitality businesses across the county via its new High Street Matter programme. This will offer 75 businesses a package of one-to-one advice, funding opportunities and peer networking, with a view to help them become more resilient so high streets can thrive. Interested businesses can find out more and register here: https://www.newangliagrowthhub.co.uk/suffolks-high-streets-matter/

River Gipping path improvements complete as full 17-mile route reopens

Walkers and local communities can once again enjoy the full length of the Gipping Valley River Path after major improvements and repairs were completed at two key locations.

Suffolk County Council has completed improvement works by the River Gipping at Creeting St Peter and Sproughton, making the route safer, more accessible and more resilient to flooding while reopening the full 17-mile Gipping Valley River Path.

Works at Creeting St Peter included upgrading wooden footbridges and boardwalks with new recycled plastic versions, while works at Sproughton included riverbank repairs, path widening, accessible ramps and a new footbridge.

The 17-mile route connects Stowmarket and Ipswich railway stations and passes Needham Market station, while linking to a wider network of walking routes across Suffolk.

The magnificent response to the Dunwich fire.

Councillor Tristan Gale, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for planning, devolution and the fire service.

The devastation to the heathlands and adjoining Minsmere is heartbreaking.
So much has been lost and it will take many years to grow back to its previously abundant wildness.

A real concern is the displacement of wildlife that inhabited the area, there are far and wide implications that only time will heal, and we hope that it will grow back stronger.
However, what is beyond question is the magnificent response of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service and all those organisations who have rallied to support them.

I have purposely not commented during the firefighting effort because I wanted the focus of

the public to be on the fire, and not on the Reform UK administration's messages.
Now that it is no longer being classed as a major incident, I am more than happy to lend my voice to those praising the response.

I want to thank every single person who has played a part, from those fighting the fire on the heath and staff working around the clock behind the scenes, to the organisations providing food, welfare, equipment, specialist advice and practical support.
I also want to thank residents and businesses in Dunwich, Westleton and the surrounding communities who have had to live with road closures, smoke, disruption, and uncertainty for almost two weeks and have shown tremendous patience and support for our emergency services.

Praise is due too to the local supermarkets that donated numerous welfare packages, and Suffolk Building Society which donated £5,000 at the start of the incident in support of the local community.

I will take this opportunity to state that the rescinding of the climate emergency declaration would not have stopped a fire of this nature taking hold. Education is key to how we manage our countryside in the ever-changing climate, and we must fight to provide the resources that we need for our emergency services.

If we genuinely want to reduce the impacts of incidents like this, our conversation going forward should be about investment in Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service.
Better-resourced fire crews with updated equipment, improved wildfire capability and the funding to meet the growing demands placed on our invaluable service and crews.