



# Neighbourhood Planning for Low Carbon Communities

## Background

The Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (SCCP) consists of Suffolk's Local Authorities and the Environment Agency, working with other organisations locally including Groundwork Suffolk, New Anglia LEP and the University of Suffolk.

Their vision is that "Suffolk wants to be an exemplar in tackling climate change and protecting and enhancing its natural environment to be the county with the greatest reduction in carbon emissions".

In 2019 Suffolk's Local Authority members all declared a 'climate emergency' and as part of this, are working towards the aspiration of making the county of Suffolk carbon neutral by 2030.

To strengthen Suffolk's climate action agenda and to engage, educate and empower individuals and organisations to act, Suffolk County Council is working with Ricardo Energy and Environment, and stakeholders from across the county to create a Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, due to be published later in 2021. The [Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, Technical Report](#) notes that achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 will require significant action across a range of stakeholders in Suffolk, and this includes Parish Councils.

A number of Parish Councils are recognising their role in this, and have declared their own climate emergencies with many communities setting up an environmental action group within their local area.

To further support their environmental ambitions, communities can utilise neighbourhood planning to conserve and enhance the natural environment, and reduce pollution.

## What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

Imagine a neighbourhood that helps you feel positive about the future, that enhances your health and wellbeing, and that creates a greater sense of connection with those around you.

Neighbourhood planning allows communities to have a say in the future of their local area. It gives you the power to produce a plan with real legal weight that directs development in your local area.

## How can a Neighbourhood Plan help reduce emissions?

As the climate emergency escalates, so too does the urgency with which we need to take action at all levels. Developing a Neighbourhood Plan offers a unique opportunity for your community to proactively set out a positive and ambitious vision for the future and increase your community's resilience in the face of the challenges associated with climate emergency.

The Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) has produced [this guidebook](#) which explores the huge potential of neighbourhood plans to plan for and build a positive future for local communities. The guide has been developed for neighbourhood planning groups and those supporting the development of neighbourhood plans with the intention of creating a positive and ambitious plan, using a 'low carbon' lens.

It is encouraged that when developing a Neighbourhood Plan, local environmental issues are considered at every opportunity. Whether your plan is in development, or already adopted, we encourage you to continuously ask how your plan will impact the local environment. Even if you are not directly involved with the plan, ask those who are and encourage them to use this opportunity to create a cleaner, greener, and more resilient community.

## How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to support [CSE's guidebook](#). We have put together a few case studies from communities in Suffolk who are already incorporating carbon reduction into their own neighbourhood plans and supporting Suffolk achieve its ambition of carbon neutrality by 2030.

It is intended that you read through these case studies for inspiration and then use [CSE's guidebook](#) to develop a greater understanding of how your Neighbourhood Plan can address key sustainability issues.

## Thurston, Mid Suffolk

Thurston's Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in 2019. Key policies included are:

- Policy 4 states that support will be given to new housing developments where electric charging points for vehicles are included.
- Policy 6 requires new developments to ensure safe pedestrian and cycle access that links up with existing pavements and cycle infrastructure, and directly connects with the key movement routes within the Parish.
- Policy 11 includes requirements for all new housing developments to incorporate provision for local wildlife to thrive, for example:
  - o Bird and bat boxes and hedgehog runs.
  - o Measures to support character species of fauna and flora.
  - o Planting schemes including native species of trees and shrubs and nectar-rich plants for bees and other pollinators.
  - o Veteran tree retention.
  - o A sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) approach to natural water management and flood resilience, including soft, green landscaping and wetland habitat close to where people live.

## Fressingfield, Mid Suffolk

Adopted in 2020, Fressingfield's Neighbourhood Plan contains policy FRES 12 Energy efficiency, low carbon technology and renewable energy. This policy only applies to non-residential development but states that:

New developments shall be designed to anticipate climate change. They should be capable of being adapted to minimise resources used in both construction and use whilst being sensitive to the local character. Support will be given to buildings that:

- Maximise passive solar gain;
- Use grey water recycling and rainwater capture,
- Incorporate measures such as biomass/wood pellet boilers, air source and ground source heat pumps
- Incorporate on-site energy generation from renewable sources such as solar panels
- Include a layout and massing that takes account of local climatic conditions, including daylight and sunlight, wind, temperature and frost pockets.

Support will also be given to proposals for solar arrays provided they are of a suitable scale and do not have an unacceptable visual impact on local landscape character.







## Framlingham, East Suffolk

Adopted in 2017, Framlingham's Neighbourhood Plan includes a specific policy for the inclusion of community growing spaces. Policy FRAM10 encourages developers to explore with the community the potential for inclusion of a community growing space of a size appropriate to the local community it would serve.



## Leiston, East Suffolk

Policy H4 in Leiston's Neighbourhood Plan concerns low carbon residential development and states that proposals which propose new buildings that are carbon neutral, or as near to carbon neutral as is reasonably possible, shall be strongly supported.



## Newmarket, West Suffolk

Although not included as a policy, Newmarket included community actions within its Neighbourhood Plan. Community Action D1 is concerned with community energy initiatives and states that Newmarket Town Council will set up a community energy group to liaise with local councils in order to investigate what actions Newmarket might take to mitigate the expected effects of climate change, by:

- Writing a sustainable energy plan for the community which will meet local energy needs without contributing to climate change or harming the prospects of future generations.
- Working towards generating the equivalent of 100% of the town's electricity demand through community owned locally-generated renewable energy.
- Exploring the feasibility of setting up a community renewable energy company and developing locally owned renewable energy projects.
- Working with the distribution network operator to reduce or move peak electricity demand in the Plan Area.
- Ensuring that the financial benefits of harnessing local clean energy resources are primarily shared amongst local people, in particular by reducing local energy demand through education and by financing energy efficiency improvements to community buildings and local homes through a community benefit fund.
- Encouraging sensitive and appropriate energy efficient measures in traditional and historic buildings.
- Uniting the local community in support of these goals.



## How do these policies link to Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan?

Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan Technical Report notes that a lot of the actions required to achieve carbon neutrality can be delivered locally and the case studies featured above are great examples of how communities in Suffolk can use neighbourhood plans to address the climate emergency. In particular, the policies highlighted in this toolkit are contributing directly to the following actions:

- Active travel
- Reduce dependence on cars
- Electric vehicle charging infrastructure
- Improved energy efficiency of buildings
- Transition to a decarbonised heat system for buildings
- Grow renewable energy capacity
- Behaviour change for climate change
- Leveraging community action

## Additional support

As well as CSE's guidebook, they are able to offer free planning advice and assistance to help draft a low carbon neighbourhood plan for your community, more information on this service is available [here](#).

The following resources are also available to provide groups with additional support and advice:

### My Community

You will find additional guides to neighbourhood planning in general.

### Neighbourhood Planning

Here you'll find everything you need to know about how to develop a Neighbourhood Plan and what support is available to you. All groups undertaking a Neighbourhood Plan are eligible to apply for grants of up to £10,000. More information on the grants available is on their website.

### Suffolk's District and Borough Councils

The first point of contact for those interested in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan is the local planning authority. In Suffolk, this would be your local District or Borough Council. They are charged by statute with the responsibility for supporting the qualifying body in the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans. They can help with approving neighbourhood forums, designating neighbourhood planning areas, assisting with the plan preparation process and the referendum.

### Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils

### East Suffolk Council

### Ipswich Borough Council

### West Suffolk Council

### SCCP Community Advisor

If you would like any further support, for example reviewing specific carbon reduction measures, then please contact SCCP's Community Advisor, Sarah Gill on 07720 098980 or [sarah.gill@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:sarah.gill@groundwork.org.uk).