

2024 General Election Manifesto

The situation:

Suffolk's diverse business community is incredibly resilient. As proven over the years since the last General Election, companies across the county have weathered the storms of COVID19 lockdowns, labour and skills shortages, inflation, excessive business taxation and low growth.

Analysis of the most recent Suffolk Chamber Quarterly Economic Surveys show that many key business indicators (such as sales, orders, investment, cash flow, turnover and profitability) are generally lower than at any time since the start of the pandemic.

That is why Suffolk's business owners and management teams need clarity as to what to expect from their local Parliamentary representatives over the next four or five years.

The Chamber:

As the county's largest, most established (founded in 1884) and most active business representative organisation, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce has been at the forefront in both lobbying and delivering positive outcomes for our members and the wider Suffolk business community.

Working through and with a range of partners, we have, for example:

- Managed the Sizewell C Supply chain (c.1500 local business signed up) which is securing hundreds of contract for local and regional firms
- Secured amendments to the Non Domestic Rating Act via a Suffolk MP to improve the flawed system's transparency
- Shaped the DWP's Kickstart scheme and delivered hundreds of job placements for young people in Suffolk
- In partnership with Norfolk Chambers, ran the Suffolk & Norfolk Local Skills Improvement Plan to boost the skills pipeline needed by businesses, especially in agritech, renewables, digital and soft skills
- Helped successfully lobby for the stretches of the A12 east of Ipswich to be upgraded as part of the Major Road Network fund
- Successfully lobbied, with others, to have the rail junctions at Ely and Haughley included in the next Network Rail investment programme, subject to Treasury sign-off
- Developed and delivered various workplace health and wellbeing programmes, engaging with hundreds of SMEs
- Hosting events and meetings to encourage practical Net Zero knowledge transfer and best practice
- Commissioned to run the Suffolk Business Digital Champions Group to help the county's firms take best advantage of new technologies

The future:

Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, through its access to thousands of businesses and their views, believes that the county's contribution to national sustainable prosperity can only be maximised through:

- Lower and smarter taxes, reliefs and legislation that incentivise and don't penalise risk-taking and innovation
- Systemic and programmed infrastructure upgrades to unlock private sector activity and investment
- Empowering businesses to be at the centre of positive economic and social changes
- Streamlining bureaucracy and supply-side blockages and reducing public debt
- Fairer revenue funding for Suffolk
- Deepening devolution of Central Government functions to maximise agile partnership working between Suffolk Chamber and the public sector

Suffolk Chamber's General Election 2024 asks:

Lower and smarter taxes:

- Replacement of business rates by a sales or turnover tax
- Corporation Tax to be reduced back to 19% by the end of the next Parliament
- R&D Tax Credits Scheme to be retained and bureaucracy reduced:
- National Living Wage increases to be subject to an SME affordability criteria

Infrastructure upgrades:

- Priority sign-off by The Treasury for Ely/Haughley rail junction improvements
- Upgrade of all A14 pinch points in Suffolk (including the Orwell Bridge and J55 Copdock Interchange) in 2025-30 and back a Greater Ipswich roads connectivity study:
- Equal per capita national funding across all key departments for Suffolk (eg Adult Education, SEND, Police etc.)
- A coordinated public/private funded programme to speed up rollout of accelerated EV charging points in the county

Empowering businesses:

- Employers to remain at the centre of skills pipeline planning after the end of the Norfolk & Suffolk LSIP
- Top-slicing of Integrated Care System budgets directly to business representative organisations to promote positive workplace health outcomes
- Liberalisation of Apprenticeship Levy to allow unspent funds to be used by smaller businesses

Streamlining bureaucracy and supply-side blockages:

- Local authorities held to an eight-week determination deadline for minor applications
- Reform of the benefits system to ensure at least 1m out of the 5.5m people on long-term sickness benefits nationally rejoin the workforce by the end of the next Parliament
- Implement policies that cap public sector net debt (excl. Bank of England holdings) to 90% of GDP

Deepening devolution of Central Government functions:

- Equal per capita national funding across all key departments for Suffolk (eg Adult Education, SEND, Police etc.)
- A single Suffolk funding settlement and greater devolution and control of funding to Suffolk, including Apprenticeships and transport: