

**17 December 2024 – for immediate release**

## **Free holiday activities and food this Christmas**

**Filmmaking, theatre, sports and creative workshops are just some of the free activities on offer during the school holidays across East Suffolk this Christmas.**

Numerous organisations across the district are providing fun and enriching activities and food as part of a programme of experiences for children and young people over the Christmas holidays. Starting from Saturday 21 December and running until Saturday 4 January, there are 19 programmes on offer with over 880 places available to book.

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme has been funded by the UK Government for three years, providing over £200m per year for activities for children and young people, particularly those in receipt of free school meals. The HAF programme is overseen by Suffolk County Council and coordinated locally by East Suffolk Council.

Holiday activities are varied and can introduce young people to new experiences and skills, from filmmaking to drama and teamwork to problem solving, as well providing opportunities for physical and social activity. Each funded holiday activity also offers a free meal.

In Suffolk, the programme is targeted at those eligible for benefits-related free school meals, and other vulnerable children, or those with additional needs who would benefit from accessing the programme.

Places are redeemed by eligible families through the booking system Eequ. Families can select the programmes and dates they wish to attend, and which young people will be attending. The booking system will ask about HAF eligibility, and the booking will be reviewed and approved by the HAF team at Suffolk County Council.

Cllr Sarah Whitelock, East Suffolk Council's cabinet member for Communities, Culture, Leisure and Tourism said: "Holiday activity programmes enable children and young people to stay active over the school holidays, to meet new people and learn new skills, all of which benefits their physical and mental health. The activities also provide support for families who may be struggling with the costs of food and energy during the school holidays."

Book a place now at <https://eastsuffolk.co/haf>

For any queries, please contact [HAF@eastsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:HAF@eastsuffolk.gov.uk)

## **Offering a Warm Welcome this winter**

A network of venues offering residents a warm, safe space to socialise over the winter has reopened for the third year.

East Suffolk Council's Warm Welcomes (formerly Warm Rooms) scheme has reopened for the winter, with more than 20 libraries, churches and community hubs providing a warm space and an opportunity to connect with other members of the local community.

Part-funded by the UK Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Warm Welcomes provide a safe and welcoming space where members of the community, including people who may be struggling with the cost of heating their homes, can come to meet with others and access information about additional support available in the community.

Cllr Sarah Whitelock, East Suffolk Council's cabinet member for Communities, Culture, Leisure and Tourism said: "I'm delighted to see the return of our Warm Welcomes scheme this winter, which provides people of all ages with a safe space to meet others, take part in activities, get on with work or just relax and enjoy a hot drink."

Earlier this year, community groups interested in joining the Warm Welcomes programme were encouraged to apply for grant funding. Venues must be open for at least 8 hours per week and the funding can be used as a contribution towards energy costs, refreshments, food, activities and the purchase or hire of resources such as craft materials.

Further details, including full addresses and opening times, are available at [www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/warm-welcomes](http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/warm-welcomes)

## **Group formed to boost community engagement in planning**

**A new community engagement group has been established to help further enhance and encourage public participation in planning matters.**

The Community Engagement Group (CEG) has been launched as part of an ongoing partnership between East Suffolk Council and East Suffolk Planning Alliance (EPSA) – launched in 2023 with the purpose strengthening community engagement in the planning system.

The alliance has since grown to comprise 56 affiliated town councils, parish councils and residents' groups, meeting regularly to identify and discuss issues around planning policy, procedure, delivery and sustainability.

An agreement has now been signed to form a community engagement group to work together with East Suffolk Council as stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process, complementing the ongoing and regular engagement East Suffolk Council has with town and parish councils on planning matters.

Cllr Mark Packard, East Suffolk Council Cabinet member for Planning and Coastal Management, said: “The CEG was formed to help empower our communities to work together, and in partnership with the local planning authority, to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of the people of East Suffolk.

“The formation of a community engagement group will, by building transparent bridges of communication with residents, help improve understanding of planning procedures for local communities and strengthen engagement on planning matters that concern us all.”

The CEG will meet three times a year at East Suffolk Council’s offices in Melton and Lowestoft, chaired by an elected member and attended by ESPA steering committee representatives, senior executives to represent the Council and its planning community, and associate agency and third parties as appropriate.

The CEG will collect questions from ESPA affiliates for submission, discussion, escalation, and resolution, with the aim of representing the full geography of East Suffolk and providing a forum to question and express views on planning processes, interpretation and implementation of strategic planning policy.

ESPA Co-founder and Administrator, Rupert Herries said: “ESPA was formed to make sure the wider community's voice and their concerns were given weight and to add balance to both strategic and local planning and development decision making.

“They intend to act as both a critical friend in these matters and as a catalyst for change when the need arises.

“ESPA is also affiliated with the nationwide Community Planning Alliance of more than 500 grassroots groups seeking greater community participation in planning, greater environmental protections, and to ensure the right developments and infrastructure in the right places.”

## **Fresh opportunity for funding to support East Suffolk residents this winter**

Voluntary organisations and community groups have another chance to apply for an East Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council ‘Cost of Living Community Grant’ to support individuals and families in communities throughout the district this winter.

The Cost of Living Community Grant fund has already supported 17 projects across East Suffolk in round one, ranging from a network of Warm Rooms in Beccles to the Woodbridge CommuniTEA Chinwag and the Emmaus Felixstowe Community Lunch.

Groups can apply for a grant of £500 to £1,500 to run projects between January and March 2025, but are encouraged to get their applications in soon – the second and final round will close on December 16.

Sarah Whitelock, East Suffolk Council's Cabinet member for Communities, Culture, Leisure and Tourism, said: "We had a great spread of projects in round one to help support local residents with warm spaces, food and social opportunities this winter.

When the weather turns cold, as it has over the last week, some residents struggle to stay warm and access hot meals, and can struggle with loneliness.

"We want to enable local organisations to tackle this and support as many people as possible. If you have a great project in mind that could hit the ground running in the new year, please get your application in as soon as you can."

Applications from projects that received a grant in round one, or a Warm Welcome grant from East Suffolk Council this winter, will not be eligible for funding and cannot be considered.

### **East Suffolk Council launches 'Circular Christmas' campaign**

#### **East Suffolk Council is encouraging residents to re-use, reduce and recycle this festive season to help keep costs down and also help the environment.**

A new 'Circular Christmas' campaign will promote shopping locally, sustainable gifting and recycling of festive waste from now until the New Year – to help people manage the expense of this holiday season and strengthen environmental awareness in East Suffolk.

The campaign, which will run across a range of East Suffolk Council online channels, is inspired by the circular economy model; a concept that involves producing, consuming, reusing and recycling materials for as long as possible to reduce the impact that single-use items have on the environment.

It will focus on ways that East Suffolk residents can make changes at Christmas time, including regifting, buying pre-loved, wrapping sustainably and reducing food waste.

[View the website feature here](#)

Residents are particularly encouraged to donate unwanted items to charity shops before the Christmas period begins, to give others the opportunity to purchase these items for their own gifting.

Cllr Sally Noble, East Suffolk's Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment, said: "The Circular Christmas campaign gets to the heart of our aims and ambitions as a Council. In particular, it supports the delivery of positive environmental impacts and, with the cost of living remaining such an issue, we know that reusing or regifting can help ease the financial strain that the Christmas period can bring."

The campaign is intended to run beyond the festive period; developing a wider focus on how East Suffolk residents can save money on purchases whilst also being environmentally conscious and aware of the waste they are producing year-round. East Suffolk Council will also be making residents aware, through social media, of food hygiene standards when eating out this Christmas, as well as informing residents about bin collection day changes and what festive waste can be recycled in their bins at home.

## **Have your say on renewal of Public Spaces Protection Orders**

**Residents in East Suffolk are invited to have their say on the proposed renewal of six Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) which expire in June 2025.**

There are 21 existing PSPOs relating to the control of dogs at locations across East Suffolk. Six of these PSPOs were adopted in June 2022 and are now due for renewal for a further three years. The PSPOs cover the following areas:

- Charsfield Recreation Ground
- Martello Park Gardens, Felixstowe
- Felixstowe Town Hall Gardens
- Felixstowe Seafront Gardens
- Langer Park children's play area
- Thorpeness beach

For ease, it is proposed to consolidate all the PSPOs in June 2025.

A separate PSPO covering Charsfield churchyard, which was introduced in 2023, will be discontinued in June 2025 as the dog controls within it are now duplicated in the Dogs on Leads General PSPO.

A public consultation is now open, and residents are invited to give their views on the proposed renewals and consolidations.

Cllr Sally Noble, East Suffolk's cabinet member for the Environment said: "We are grateful to all those who keep their dog on a lead where required, who clean up after their dog and who avoid walking in restricted areas. The majority of dog owners understand the impact their dogs can have on other people and the environment and by adhering to the controls

within these PSPOs, everyone can enjoy spending time in public spaces, with or without a dog.”

Share your views at <https://eastsuffolk.co/pspo>

Full details of the existing PSPOs can be found at [www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/dog-control](http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/dog-control)

The consultation closes on 1 February 2025.

We may not be able to reply directly to every consultation response, but please be assured all comments received will be considered in the final decision. For questions about the consultation, please email [environmental.protection@eastsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:environmental.protection@eastsuffolk.gov.uk)