

IS SUFFOLK READY FOR THE *government's electric car revolution?*

The inevitable shift to electric cars may seem daunting – but find out how Suffolk is leading the way in the eco-revolution. By **Danielle Lett**

As the government looks to end the sale of all petrol and diesel cars in the UK by 2030, Suffolk's road users have just under a decade to get on board with electric cars. But how well-equipped is the county for such a monumental change?

Meet Peter Frost. He's Suffolk County Council's environment strategy officer, and he's spearheading the county's electric vehicle revolution, ensuring the region's roads and users are ready for the upcoming deadline.

"When I first joined the council, I was very passionate about electric vehicles thanks to years of experience in the motoring trade, and I knew that people's main worries were how far would an electric car travel, and how would you charge it when out and about.

"We found the best way to address that was to place charging points across the county for people to use when they're going about their daily business. I spoke to the council and we came up with the idea of Plug in Suffolk. We set up various destination chargers, so when someone goes to the shops and they're parked up for a few hours, they're able to plug in and recharge."

Established in 2019, Plug in Suffolk is a joint initiative between the council and EO Charging, and has so far provided around 120 publicly-accessible electric charging points across the county.

Peter found many people were put off getting electric cars because users would need to join a number of charging clubs in order to access charging facilities while on the road – but Plug in Suffolk wanted to eliminate that inconvenience by introducing a number of easy-to-access chargers.

"When I worked in motoring, I saw this very frequently - there were more than 40 different charging clubs across the UK who had to join. This made it very confusing for anyone who was

thinking of getting an electric car, because if you were planning to drive your car out of the area, you wouldn't necessarily know which charging clubs you'd need to join without doing research in advance.

"But here in Suffolk, you don't need an app or a fob to access a charging point – you just plug in, and then tap your card to pay. At the time, we were the first place in the country to have a completely open access 'fast charging' network.

"At Crown Street car park in Ipswich, as soon as you drive in, straight ahead of you, you'll see a row of electrical charging points. It does vary, but at Crown Street, you only need pay for your parking, and charging is an added bonus."

Earlier this year, the government introduced legislation that required all newly-installed rapid chargers to accept contactless payments.

But what types of chargers are out there, and what are the differences between them?

"There are two types – rapid and fast. Rapid chargers use a direct current, and they put in a lot of power very quickly. You tend to find these at places such as service stations. Fast chargers however use an alternating current. They're a bit slower, but are cheaper to install.

"Here in Suffolk, our aim was to install fast chargers in places where people are going to be parked up for a couple of hours anyway, so it doesn't matter if they're a bit slower."

With a number of charging points now in place – how often would you need to use them, and how long does an electric car retain its charge for?

"Back when I started working with them, electric cars had a range of about 80 miles, which was quite restrictive. If you wanted to go from the north of Suffolk down to the south, you'd be concerned with where you'd be able to charge. But with the latest generation of electric cars, their



Bays for charging electric cars will become a more common sight in Suffolk over the next decade

range is around 200 to 250 miles, even 300 on some of them. A car with a 250-mile range is two weeks commuting for a lot of people.

"Prior to lockdown, I'd go all around Suffolk and Norfolk in my electric car for work, which has a 160-mile range. I've been to King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth and back without recharging along the way. You wouldn't need to worry about

going from one end of Suffolk to the other and back again, as you can just charge at home."

An estimated 60% of homes having their own off-road parking, so how do residents set up an electrical charging point at home – and how do those without access to a private drive charge their cars?

"Most people who go to the

effort of getting an electric car will then take the decision to install a charging point at home, and it's very easy to do."

While at an-home charge point typically costs around £800 to install, the government are currently offering grants of up to 75% of the cost.

Alternatively, you can also plug your car into a three-pin socket, as you would if you were charging your phone.

"On average, it costs about £3 worth of electricity to charge up your car enough in order to drive 160 miles. When you think about how much electricity costs, and if you charge it on the cheaper rate overnight, it's such minimal cost.

"For anyone thinking about getting an electric car and doesn't have access to their own parking, or lives in a flat with communal parking, we're currently trialling a scheme in Bury St Edmunds with on-street charging for residents, and looking at the logistics of that. But as electric cars have a bit more range now,



you don't even need to charge up every night - you can do it once a week, dependent on the model.

"You can also even wash your car as you're charging it. A lot of people have worries about water when it comes to electric vehicles, but when you plug it in to charge it, the car's system double checks for safety, to ensure there's no risk of electric shock."

With electric cars more economical than ever before, can Peter see Suffolk's roads turning green anytime soon?

"I'm definitely finding more people are interested in electric cars, and once someone does make the switch, all of those worries about range and practicality evaporate. While electric cars may cost more to purchase, over time you're paying so little in running costs and maintenance, they really do pay for themselves. There's minimal servicing fees and no fuel costs as there are with petrol and diesel cars.

"The obvious perk though is how environmentally-friendly

they are. If you drive past someone in a petrol or diesel car, they're breathing those fumes in, but with an electric car, you're doing something good for the rest of the world."

Earlier this year, the British Heart Foundation found that air pollution levels in Suffolk could potentially lead to 2,300 deaths over the next decade - with the charity calling the situation a 'public health emergency'.

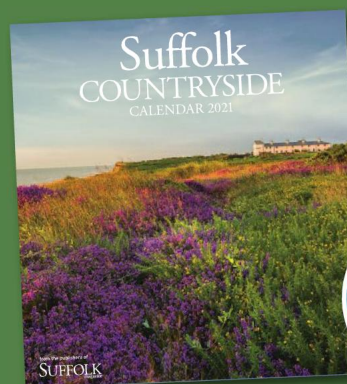
"By improving Suffolk's charging network, we will be contributing to better air quality, reducing carbon emissions and cutting down our reliance on fossil fuels - all supporting the council's ambition to create the greenest county," adds Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for environment and public protection.

"It is my belief though that electric cars are improving so quickly that even by 2025, I don't think your average driver is even going to consider a petrol or diesel car," says Peter.

Anglia Car Charging's Richard Sepping, Suffolk County Council's Peter Frost, and EO Charging's Charlie Jardine with one of Suffolk's many publicly-accessible car charging points
Picture: KEITH MINDHAM

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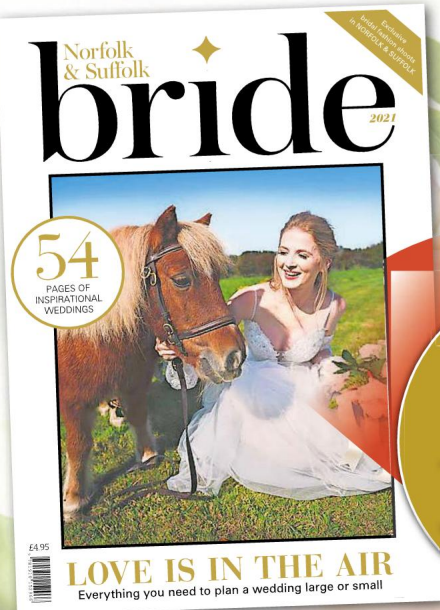
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