

Suffolk Sight News



**Autumn
Winter
2024/25**



Suffolk Sight

Suffolk Sight is your local, community-based sight loss charity supporting children and adults of all ages.

We work hard to provide services that are friendly and practical, and to raise awareness of the different aspects of living with sight loss. These can include daily living aids, emotional support, benefits advice and the latest tech solutions. You're welcome to book a visit to one of our resource hubs or we can arrange to visit you at home. Find out about our social opportunities; connect to our befriending scheme, and be put in touch with other services based on your personal interests.

Our dedicated team are here to offer support, advice and guidance based on your individual sight loss needs. We work closely with you for as long as you need, offering ideas and solutions to help with confidence and independence.

Suffolk Sight is an independent charity and as such receives no funding from the government. We rely on our amazing supporters to continue our work through donations, legacies and non-statutory grants.

Supporting You - Services

As a beneficiary of **Suffolk Sight** you will be able to access a wealth of support and information. It's free and you can choose your level of engagement and involvement.

Our dedicated and highly skilled team of community workers and technical advisers understand the issues that people face as they live their life with a visual impairment.

Continued on inside back cover

Volunteering for *Suffolk Sight*

You can make a difference. We welcome the opportunity to involve volunteers in all aspects of our work.

We have lots of different roles, from social clubs to social media, fundraising, administration, transport and befriending. There are plenty of ways throughout the organisation that you can help.

Contact us and we can tell you about our opportunities and discuss how best we can support each other.

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Image shows members of the Suffolk Sight team at this year’s Suffolk Sight Equipment and Information Day – see page 15.

SAVE THE DATE

Our 2025 Equipment and Information day will be held on Wednesday 11 June in the Edmund Room (above Pilgrims’ Kitchen), St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury St Edmunds.

A bumper issue

It was apparent at our first editorial meeting that this edition would be a bumper issue with more pages than ever before. This not only reflects the increased Suffolk Sight activity, but also shows how keen people are to submit articles that they, and we, believe are worthy of sharing with you. I hope you agree.

As always there are lots of people and organisations that we are grateful to for their support and kind generosity, some of which are featured in this edition. With 2025 on the horizon, we are pleased to announce that Newmedica Suffolk have chosen us as their charity of choice. We have begun to discuss the many ways that we might work closely together to enhance the lives of those living with sight loss and they have already given us an incredible donation of £6000.

Then there are those who generously give us their time. Key to the success of Suffolk Sight is the support provided by our volunteers. I'm certain that all charities would say the same, but it was very apparent at the Thank You event for Suffolk Sight volunteers, that ours are truly special. Of course not all our volunteers could attend, so to ensure that nobody feels left out we, the trustees and staff team, would like to take this opportunity of thanking you all in 2024 and look forward to working more closely together in 2025.

So, seasonal greetings and all the best for 2025 and I leave you with a photograph of the presentation of the cheque from Newmedica to Suffolk Sight, a very welcome early Christmas present.

Geoff Staff
Chair of Trustees



Suffolk Sight Looking Ahead Emotional Support

The Looking Ahead emotional support service reached its 5th birthday in September 2024.

We continue to support beneficiaries who are struggling with the emotional impact of living with sight loss, with our private and confidential one-to-one telephone counselling.

The service is so invaluable, and we could not continue without the support of local funding grants, fundraising and donations.

We would like to thank the Co-op Local Community Fund, the Hargrave Cross Country Run, and Tesco Bury St Edmunds (for their donation raised from charity book sales) as they have all helped to fund the service, as well as everyone who supported our recent Gala Night.



Image shows attendees of the Gala Night enjoying a good night out while at the same time supporting Suffolk Sight.

Suffolk Sight Charity Gala Night Saturday 14 September 2024

On behalf of the *Looking Ahead* service at Suffolk Sight we would like to thank everyone who attended our Gala Night. There was a fabulous turnout, and a great night was had by all.

We raised £1,684 and this will help us to continue the much-needed emotional support service, which offers private and confidential one-to-one telephone counselling to our beneficiaries.

We would also like to thank the following businesses and people who made contributions towards our event:

The Greyhound Country
Country Pub and Kitchen

Red Side Up Printers

The Mortgage Centre

Haverhill Arts Centre

C & W Automotive Ltd

Card Factory, Haverhill

Little Anatolia/
Star Burger & Grill

Tea at Number 5

All Over Beauty

Fiona Louise Photography

Clubbercise/Zumba

Cabells Cuts

Andy Palazon Disco
Kitchen

Kingfisher Press Ltd

Haverhill Golf Club

Pleasurewood Hills

Brook of Blooms

Déjà Vu coffee shop

Doffy's Vintage Tea Room

Jamie's Meat Inn

Tattoo

Karen Bonser Holistic Harmony

Antoinette Pereira

Matilda-Rose Nails & Beauty

Through Our Eyes – Art Exhibition

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, we were preparing for the *Through Our Eyes* exhibition at the Sakura Studio Gallery in Stonham.

The exhibition was a resounding success and our special thanks go to Albany Tripp for all her hard work putting it together, especially as she was very busy looking after her family and preparing for a new arrival at the same time!

We were overwhelmed by the 127 pieces of art that were entered. We had bids on 36 items, which raised £472 from the auction.

The remaining art will be kept on display and continue to raise funds for Suffolk Sight.

Agnieszka our Social Club and Volunteer Co-ordinator, (and very talented artist herself) was delighted with how well the exhibition went:

“We had such strong and lovely support from our members across Suffolk. We were able to display the work of our beneficiaries, to show what they are capable of. We had volunteers, members and local artists all working together on this project, for which we are extremely grateful.”

You can see the remaining art, and lots of other talented artists' creations at: Pod 7-8, Stonham Barns Park, Pettaugh Road, Stonham Aspal, IP14 6AT

For more information email sakurastudiogallery@gmail.com



Image shows Albany, with her toddler and newborn in her arms, and Amanda, our Services Manager, with a giant cheque made out to Suffolk Sight for £472.00

A partnership bringing drama, art, singing and seated yoga

This year we have been lucky to work in partnership with Cohere Arts CIC. Dr Amy Mallett, their Executive Director (and an artist) managed to secure some funding to take bespoke, artist-led workshops to our visually-impaired club members all around Suffolk. The workshops were free to attend, supported by trained Suffolk Sight volunteers and were specially tailored to enable people living with sight loss and their companions to try their hand at drama, art, singing and seated yoga. There was no need to have any



Images show, top left, seated yoga session at Bury St Edmunds, top right, an artistic impression of one of our volunteers Rose, by a Haverhill member and above a drama session at Mildenhall.

experience in any of the art forms, and all activities were optional, with time afterwards to enjoy some social time with complimentary refreshments. The feedback we got from the clubs was incredible – everyone loved the sessions! Amy is working really hard behind the scenes to secure funding to be able to offer more workshops next year. We are looking forward to the future and continuing this fantastic partnership.

Cohere Arts run regular sessions for drama workshops on Thursdays in Ipswich.

National Eye Health Week

National Eye Health Week takes place every year in September. It's an ideal opportunity for us to promote the importance of good eye health and the need for regular eye tests for all.

This year, we teamed up with Magdalen House Care Home in Hadleigh. Natalie Crampton, Regional Resident Liaison Manager for Allegra Care, invited us to hold an advice and drop-in session at the home during National Eye Health Week.

At the start of the week, the team at Magadalen House also held a store collection to raise money for Suffolk Sight. They were joined



Image shows the Magdalen House collection at Morrisons with Natalie Crampton and James Cartlidge MP

by local MP James Cartlidge who was keen to find out more about our services.

We were delighted to help the local community who came along to the drop-in session, to discuss various topics around sight loss.

We were also joined by Sarah, from Hadleigh Library, who brought along a range of large-print books and will be helping the home to set up an audio book club.

The team at Magdalen House were the perfect hosts. Not only did they provide a lovely venue and refreshments, they presented us with a cheque for £127 from the store collection held at the start of the week.

A huge thanks to Natalie, and all of the team who were involved.

We have a social club which meets at the care home on the second Thursday of the month between 10am–12 noon

Please get in touch to find out more:

Tel 01284 748800 or email info@suffolksight.org.uk



Image shows the presentation of the cheque by Magdalen House on behalf of Allegra Care

Fundraising update October 2024

Here is a quick round up of some of the support we have gratefully received over the past few months.

Gerry Sheen, one of our beneficiaries at Suffolk Sight, is one of our top fundraisers! Gerry regularly holds Craft Sales and collections for us, raising hundreds of pounds. He also regularly donates items for us to use as prizes. Big thanks to Gerry for his unwavering support, which is very much appreciated.

The Bury Abbey Rotary Club made a generous donation of £500 to us in the summer, towards running our group activities.

Our Quiz Nights, hosted by Suffolk Sight supporter Tony Mallett, usually raise between £200 and £300. Thanks go to Mark Dye at Stowupland Sports and Social Club, for allowing us free use of the Club House for the quiz nights.

We once again held a Cuddly Toy Tombola at the Lions Fun Day at Oulton Broad in August. Most of the toys were collected by Suffolk Sight Trustee Michael Peak, who couldn't get into his spare bedroom due to the sheer number of bags of teddies he managed to collect! The stall was a great success, selling out by mid-afternoon and raising £120.

Ipswich Hospital Band have teamed up with us to be their charity partner for their forthcoming Christmas Concert, which will be held at St Peters on the Waterfront in Ipswich, on 7 December. Suffolk Sight will be running the raffle and will also receive half of the ticket sales. We would like to extend our thanks to the band for choosing to support us in this way.

As a small, independent charity, Suffolk Sight do not receive any statutory funding at all, so we are totally reliant on the generosity of our supporters.



Image shows Amanda at the Bury Abbey Rotary Club

There are many ways in which you can help us, here are a few suggestions:

- Make a regular donation
- Organise a fundraising event
- Donate your unwanted items for us to sell or use as prizes
- Hold a collection tin in your home or business
- Leave a legacy in your will
- Sign up for the Suffolk Sight Lottery

If you would like to discuss any of these ideas with us in more detail, please do get in touch. You can call the office on 01284 748800 or email us at info@suffolksight.org.uk

Can you offer a home for one of our collection tins?

To continue our fundraising efforts, we are looking for new locations for our collection tins and boxes. If there are any individuals or



Image shows some of the bright yellow Suffolk Sight collection tins and a collection box.

businesses who could find a space, perhaps in a local shop or workplace, we would love to hear from you.

Please contact us on 01284 748800 or email info@suffolksight.org.uk

Thank you

East Anglian Beer & Cider Festival 2024

This year's festival took place from 21 to 26 August in St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

This year the festival was the most successful yet, with record attendances and quaffing of the ales and ciders. So with the hours that our Suffolk Sight team put in, we are hoping for a corresponding record donation.

Unfortunately we won't know the amount until after this newsletter is published, so look out for the relevant article in the next edition. The image shows Meg and Amanda having a swift taster before the festival opened.



Don't miss out on future editions

A quick reminder, to ensure that you don't miss out on future editions of our newsletter – don't forget to tell us about any change of address or personal information.

Please contact our office on 01284 748800 or 01473 611011

Email: info@suffolksight.org.uk

We will never share your information with anyone else, and you can unsubscribe from our mailing list at any time.

Social club round up

For the last few months, we have enjoyed seeing the clubs blooming. So many members have joined more than one club and so many volunteers have helped at other clubs. Seeing all of us together – united, connected – is a dream come true. I have seen first hand the dedication and care our volunteers put in to make it happen and our members are having so much fun.

One of the most popular and liked activities was a trip to *The Hut* in Felixstowe for a day at the seaside with fish and chips. No matter what the weather, spirits were high! I know more of these trips are planned for the next year – join your local club to be in the loop for this and many more things to come.

I would like to thank my volunteers for the difference they are making in people's lives – and for all the work they do and the people they are!

Agnieszka Jeffery

Social Club and Volunteer Co-ordinator



Images show, on the left, members of the Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds clubs enjoying fish and chips at Felixstowe and, on the right, Bob, a Haverhill club member, presenting Kevin with a painting of Elsa, his guide dog who retired this year.

Suffolk Sight Juniors

Suffolk Sight Juniors is our group for visually-impaired children, young adults and their families. The group provides an opportunity for people to come together, share advice, get information and have fun joining in with the activities on offer.

The group is held at Red Gables in Stowmarket, on the first Saturday of every month, from 10.30–12.30pm.

Our theme for August was Pirates! The children came dressed up as pirates and took part in games such as walk the plank and pirate treasure hunt. The session ended with a water pistol fight in the grounds of Red Gables, where great fun was had by all, including the adults!

To find out more about Suffolk Sight Juniors please contact Amanda Eaves via the office: 01284 748800 or email: a.eaves@suffolksight.org.uk



Image shows our young pirates having fun.

Haverhill Show

We had an amazing day, through rain and shine, at the Haverhill Show in July!

A huge thank you to everyone who came to chat to us, had a go on the tombola and to those who made a donation. We raised just over £300!

The picture shows our fantastic team of 7 volunteers who worked extremely hard prepping for the event and during the day.

Following the event, the Show Committee distributed £2,000 to local charities and good causes. We were delighted to be chosen to receive a share of those funds.

Special thanks to Harry and Donna who presented the cheque for £200 to Trisha, our Volunteer Ambassador.

Images show the Haverhill magnificent seven and Trisha with the cheque from the Show Committee.



Suffolk Sight Equipment and Information Day



The picture above shows that we had an amazing time hosting our annual Equipment and Information Day at The Olive Centre in Lowestoft in June.

We were joined on the day by tech suppliers Associated Optical, Vision Aid and Cobolt Systems.

Local charities and organisations in attendance were: The Macular Society, Vision Norfolk, Sensing Change, Communities Together East Anglia, Disability Advice North East Suffolk and Christies Care Ltd.

The weather was autumnal but that didn't dampen our spirits with around 80 people attending during the day!

A special mention also to Cllr Nasima Begum, Lowestoft Town Council Mayor and to Cllr Andy Pearce for coming along. Cllr Begum commented on the fantastic support and technology available for those with a visual impairment.

Date for your diaries – our 2025 Equipment and Information day will be held on Wednesday 11 June in the Edmund Room (above Pilgrims' Kitchen), St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury St Edmunds.



Image shows our team with Mayor Cllr Nasima Begum and Cllr Andy Pearce.

The Knife Angel

If you live in the Haverhill area, you may have seen the Knife Angel.

The sculpture was created by artist Alfie Bradley and the British Ironworks Centre. It is made from over 100,000 seized blades and was created to highlight the negative effects of violent behaviour of all types including knife crime, domestic assault, sexual abuse and county lines.

Not only does the statue act as a catalyst for turning the tide on violent and aggressive behaviour, it also acts as a memorial designed to commemorate the lives lost through violent and thoughtless actions.

Kevin, one of our volunteers who lives locally, had the chance to get up close to the sculpture.

The photo shows Kevin carefully feeling the sculpture. You can see each knife in detail, and it is very thought provoking.



Suffolk Sight's Got Talent!

We love to hear about the talents of our beneficiaries, and for this newsletter we wanted to introduce you to Jim Watt.

Jim (pictured) goes to our Mildenhall social club and when we found out that he played the electric guitar, of course we asked him to play for us! We thoroughly enjoyed his performance, and Jim has now agreed to play for some of our other social clubs.

Jim has a great philosophy in life ... "If you have a dream in your life, DO IT, don't let visual impairment get in your way, and whatever you do, ENJOY IT"



"Hi everybody, my name is, Jim Watt, I am 67 years old, and have been registered blind, since the age of 15, when I was diagnosed with Stargardt disease.

After an accident in 2000, I was then classed as blind (Severely Sight Impaired) and eventually got my Guide Dog, when in 2015, I had to give up working.

I have had a great working career, including precision engineering, computer programming and becoming the landlord of my own pub.

Through my life I have tried not to let anything stop me from having a go, by buying the tools to help me do that. Also, there are lots of hobbies to mention. From a young age I have been a musician, playing guitar and keyboards, which I still do to this day.

I played golf, took flying lessons, and played first division petanque.

In 2017 I was approached by Greater Anglia to become a volunteer, and I am still a very active member on the Accessibility Panel.

I have been very lucky in my life in doing these things, and a lot more."

If you would like to share your story, and perhaps a special talent, please get in touch with us.

Contact: 01284 748800 or 01473 611011

Email: info@suffolksight.org.uk

Ray-Ban Meta Smart Glasses: Why the visually-impaired community is buzzing

Ray-Ban's smart glasses are causing excitement, not just among fashion lovers, but also in the visually-impaired community. These stylish specs, starting from £299, come packed with tech that makes everyday tasks easier. Let's explore why they're such a hit.

What Are Meta Ray-Ban Smart Glasses?

On the surface, these look like regular stylish sunglasses, but they include built-in cameras, speakers, and microphones, all of which connect to your smartphone. While they won't improve your vision, they offer hands-free interaction with the world, making daily tasks simpler for visually-impaired users.

Hands-Free Navigation

Picture yourself walking down the road, hands-free, but still able to snap a photo, answer a call, send a message, or get turn-by-turn directions—all without fumbling for your phone. For the visually impaired, this is a game changer. Normally, using phones for navigation or accessibility tools requires constant attention, but with these glasses, you can use voice commands to control many functions. It offers a level of independence that makes getting around more seamless – all while wearing classic Ray-Bans.



Image shows Clare looking cool in her Meta Ray-Ban Smart Glasses.

Staying Connected, Safely

The built-in speakers in Ray-Ban smart glasses let you stay connected to the world around you without needing earbuds or headphones. You can listen to phone calls, music, or GPS directions, all while staying aware of your surroundings. This open-ear design is particularly useful for visually-impaired users who need to stay alert to sounds like traffic or nearby conversations.

Easy Photo and Video Capture

Taking photos can be difficult when you're visually impaired, but Ray-Ban's smart glasses make it much easier. Simply look at what you want to capture, tap a button on the frame or give a voice command, and the photo is taken. You can instantly share those photos or videos on Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp – completely hands-free.

Meta AI: Descriptions and Text Reading

One standout-feature is the integration of Meta AI, which can describe what the camera sees. This is incredibly useful for visually-impaired users to identify objects or get a sense of their surroundings. Just ask, and Meta AI will snap a photo and describe what's in front of you.

The glasses also include basic text-recognition capabilities, summarizing text from menus, signs, or documents. While it's not full optical character recognition (OCR), you can ask specific questions like "What's the total on this bill?" or "What temperature is the thermostat set to?" for quick and helpful answers.

Call a Friend or Volunteer

If you need assistance, you can use apps like *WhatsApp* or *Facebook Messenger* to video call a friend and share what you're seeing. Soon, with Meta's partnership with *Be My Eyes*, you'll be able to connect with volunteers who can help with tasks like reading signs or navigating unfamiliar spaces.

Battery Life and Charging

Ray-Ban's smart glasses offer several hours of use on a single charge. When you need to recharge, just pop them into their case, which also acts as a portable charger.

Style Meets Accessibility

These smart glasses combine advanced tech with Ray-Ban's iconic fashion sense. Whether you choose clear, transition, polarized, or prescription lenses, they look just as sleek as non-tech glasses – allowing you to stay stylish while benefiting from cutting-edge features.

The Future Potential

The partnership with *Be My Eyes* is just the beginning. As AI and smart glasses technology continue to evolve, visually-impaired users can expect even better features and more seamless assistance. More accurate AI responses and additional accessibility functions are on the horizon, making these glasses an ever-more valuable tool for everyday life.

Key Considerations:

- **Smartphone Required:** You'll need an Android or Apple phone to set up and use the glasses.
- **Internet Connection:** Many features, including Meta AI, require an active internet connection.
- **Patchy Rollout:** Meta AI's UK rollout has been uneven, so some features might not be immediately available in all areas.
- **AI Limitations:** Like any AI, Meta can sometimes provide inaccurate information and currently won't read entire documents or describe people.

Ray-Ban Meta smart glasses offer a powerful combination of style and functionality, with the promise of even more to come as the technology improves. They may not be as nuanced as some of the bespoke VI solutions available, but for the price, they may be just what you are looking for!

Assistive Technology Support Sessions

We will be holding an Assistive Technology Support Session on Saturday 18 January 2025, 10am–12 noon, to help you with any new devices that you may have received over the Christmas period.

It doesn't matter if you have experience with technology, or you consider yourself to be a complete novice, we can work with you and give you tailored support.

So, whether you want to make your computer easier to see, have your post read aloud, or learn how to connect with friends and family using your voice alone, our tech volunteers can help.

Our drop-in sessions will return more frequently later in the year.

Location: Lowestoft Library, Clapham Road South, Lowestoft, NR32 1DR

For more information call 01284 748800



Volunteer Thank You Tea Party

Once a year we hold a special event to thank our dedicated volunteers for their time and commitment.

This year we all met at The Stevenson Centre, in Great Cornard.

The room was filled with lively conversations as everyone had the chance to catch up and socialise with other volunteers from across the county.

Whilst we enjoyed the tasty treats, we were joined by talented musicians, Paul Airey playing the keyboard, and Anne Chorley who played the harp.

Each volunteer was presented with a home-made jar of lemon curd, with a label attached saying 'Thank you, you're a star'. A very special thanks to Arlette for providing those.



Image shows one of the home-made jars of lemon curd given as a thank you to volunteers.

A special mention also to Tesco in Stowmarket and Waitrose in Sudbury for their contributions towards the refreshments.

If you would like to join our amazing team of volunteers, please get in touch

Email info@suffolksight.org.uk or call 01473 611011

New Ambassadors for Suffolk Sight

Suffolk Sight is a local, independent charity with a small staff team of part-time workers, providing support for over 2,500 visually-impaired members. Therefore, we are heavily reliant on our amazing volunteers, to enable us to run all of our services.

Volunteer roles are many and varied and include driving, administration, being a trustee and running the 16 social groups across the county.

The latest role we have recently added to the growing list is that of the Suffolk Sight Ambassadors. This role will involve representing the charity at events, giving talks and generally being the face of our lovely charity.

The first two people we would like to welcome into this newly-created role are Trisha Wynn and Colin Presland.

Both Trisha and Colin have a long history of volunteering with Suffolk Sight.

Colin currently runs monthly Tech sessions over at Lowestoft Library, as well as assisting with the Bury, Mildenhall and Suffolk Sight Juniors groups. Colin also served as a Trustee for a number of years.

Trisha has provided admin support in our Bury office and has also been a trustee. Currently she heads up the Emotional Support Telephone Counselling Service, runs the low vision appointments diary, assists with the production of the newsletter and helps out at the Mildenhall and Haverhill social groups.

We are very fortunate in having Trisha and Colin on the volunteer team, and we know that they will both make perfect Ambassadors.

If you would like to find out more about becoming an ambassador, please get in touch.

Call 01473 611011 or 01284 748800

Email info@suffolksight.org.uk



Image is of Colin Presland, one of the first two Suffolk Sight ambassadors.

Free walking, cycling and wheeling activities to keep you well and active

The Way to Go Suffolk team are celebrating the second year of their 'walking and cycling for wellbeing' pilot project.

Over the last nine months, they have been running a number of free walking and cycling groups at various locations in Ipswich and Lowestoft. You can take part in the beginner 'cuppa and a stroll' sessions, moderate cycling and walking, or the more advanced sessions.

The groups offer residents an opportunity to take greater control of their health and wellbeing.

They also offer the opportunity to meet new people and the sessions are absolutely free too!

At a recent team meeting, we had the chance to try out some of the accessible trikes and tandem bikes.

With a range of visual impairment and sporting abilities among the team, we didn't know what to expect! Everyone really enjoyed riding the bikes and we look forward to arranging more sessions in the future.

If you would like to find out more, visit the website at <https://walkingandcyclinginsuffolk.org.uk> – or call 01473 260060



Image shows members of the Suffolk Sight team trying out some of the accessible trikes and tandem bikes.

Eye conditions explained – this edition's is Diabetic Retinopathy

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, we are delighted to welcome Raj Hanspal, Consultant Ophthalmologist and Clinical Director of Newmedica Suffolk, to our Board of Trustees. Raj has kindly written this article explaining Diabetic Retinopathy.



What is Diabetic Retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is a complication of diabetes that affects the eyes, potentially leading to vision loss or blindness if not managed properly. It occurs when high blood sugar levels cause damage to the blood vessels in the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye.

Stages of Diabetic Retinopathy

Background Retinopathy: Early stage where tiny bulges develop in the blood vessels, which may bleed slightly but do not usually affect vision.

Pre-proliferative Retinopathy: More severe changes and bleeding occur in the retina.

Proliferative Retinopathy: New blood vessels grow on the retina, which can bleed easily and cause scar tissue, leading to vision loss.

Symptoms

In the early stages, diabetic retinopathy often has no symptoms. As it progresses, symptoms may include:

- Gradually worsening vision
- Sudden vision loss
- Floaters (shapes floating in your field of vision)
- Blurred or patchy vision
- Eye pain or redness

Prevention and Management

Regular Eye Exams: Annual comprehensive dilated eye exams are crucial for early detection and treatment.

Control Blood Sugar Levels: Keeping blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels under control can significantly reduce the risk of developing diabetic retinopathy.

Healthy Lifestyle: Maintaining a healthy diet, regular exercise, and avoiding smoking can help manage diabetes and protect your vision.

Treatment Options

Laser Treatment: To shrink abnormal blood vessels.

Injections: Medications injected into the eye to reduce swelling and slow the growth of new blood vessels.

Surgery: To remove blood or scar tissue from the eye.

If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of diabetic retinopathy, it's important to seek medical advice promptly to prevent further vision loss.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome Support Group

Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS) is a condition affecting some people living with sight loss. Specifically, it causes some individuals to see images that are not really there, medically known as hallucinations.

Current research shows that in the UK, one in five adults with sight loss also experience CBS. However, research is still in its early stages, and it is now known that children with sight loss can also be affected, making the total number with the condition much higher.

Many of our members at Suffolk Sight are affected by CBS, so we have recently started a support group.

At present, meetings are held monthly over the telephone, providing an opportunity for those participating to meet others with the same condition, share experiences and offer each other advice and support.

The first meetings have been very energetic, with attendees speaking openly and sincerely. After the meetings, members attending have commented how worthwhile they found the group, particularly having the opportunity to meet and talk with others living with CBS.

We would sincerely like to thank those attending the meetings for helping the support group get off to such a strong start.

If any of our other members affected by CBS feel they too would like to become involved in a similar support group, please contact us as detailed below and we will gladly get back to you.

Tel: 01284 748800, email: info@suffolksight.org.ok

2025 Suffolk Sight large-print calendars and diaries

We have the following calendars and diaries in stock (pictured)

A3 large-print wall calendar. suggested donation of £5

Large-print pocket diary (A6) £ 6.50

Large-print midi diary (A5) £8.50

Large-print desk diary (A4) £10.50

Please call the office on
01284 748800 or
01473 611011
for more information.



Remembering WW2 veteran Walter Nixon

Walter was a regular visitor to our Shotley social club and he will be sorely missed.

Walter enrolled in the Army aged 19 and after six weeks' basic training in King's Lynn, Norfolk, went on to fight in Africa and during the Battle of Anzio.

He was 20 years old during the beach landings behind enemy lines as allied forces fought to break the German defences in southern Italy.

The fighting led to 10,000 British casualties and ended with the liberation of Rome on 4 June, 1944 – just two days before the D-Day Landings dominated headlines.

Walter had reflected that their service and sacrifice had felt somewhat forgotten because of the focus on D-Day.

In later life Walter developed Macular Degeneration but didn't let that hold him back. He enjoyed going to the social club and meeting up with friends. His son recalls how he would always buy raffle tickets and often came back with a 'bottle of something'.

He lived independently at his home until the start of 2024 when he then received help from Blind Veterans UK to move into a care home.

Walter passed away shortly after moving into the Care Home at the age of 101.

Walter was featured in a recent BBC news article. You can find out more about his time in the army, and his emotional visit back to Italy in 2019.

Go to: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-suffolk-68905604>

Photos and story shared with permission from the Nixon Family.



Welcoming Paula to our team of Community Workers

My affinity with sight and sight loss began in 2000 when I worked as an optical assistant in Specsavers, Bury St Edmunds. After 2 years I moved to the Stowmarket branch where I worked my way up to Store Manager but also began working in the lab, assembling customers' spectacles.



After 7 years, I transferred to a brand-new branch in Diss where I was heavily involved in training and getting the store up and running. After a few years in store management, I stepped back and took the role of lab manager. In 2017, I left Specsavers to work as a GP receptionist, moving on to the role of Ophthalmology Medical Secretary at Ipswich Hospital in 2019 and, following Covid, took the opportunity in 2020 of working for the Diabetic Eye Screening Programme.

My hobbies are pretty run of the mill, going to the cinema, live music gigs and air shows, as well as going out for food, but my personal favourite – scouring charity shops! I have also recently started an online course in digital marketing which is taking up a lot of my free time, not for any reason other than I thought it might be interesting and takes me out of my comfort zone.

Well, that's me in a nutshell. I look forward to working with you all.

Farewell and Happy Retirement to Jane

In July, we sadly bid farewell to one of our Community Worker Team, Jane Laws, who decided the time was right for her to retire.

Jane joined Suffolk Sight in 2022, following a 30-year career as a Social Worker with the Adult Care team.

Jane was a well-loved and respected member of the team here at Suffolk Sight and will be greatly missed.

We wish her a long and happy retirement and hope she enjoys spending more time with her family and lots of long walks with her Labrador.

Susan Holmes

At the point of this newsletter going to press, we learnt of the passing of a great supporter of the charity, Mrs Susan Holmes. Susan was a lady of firm views, who was always ready to play her part in getting things done!

She was a trustee of ESAB and chair of our Southwold group for many years. Susan will be sorely missed and our condolences go to her husband John and family.

Disability Advice North East Suffolk

Our friends at Disability Advice North East Suffolk (DANES) have kindly offered us the opportunity to hold a monthly drop-in session at their offices in Lowestoft.

Our team will be available to give personalised advice and support including:

- Daily living and independence – aids and adaptations
- Low vision – magnification and assistive reading (with referrals to our low-vision specialist where appropriate)
- Financial matters – benefits, grants and concessions
- Tech solutions – gadget advice and demonstrations
- Social opportunities and befriending service
- Advice about services that can help you get out and about safely

We will be available on the following dates:

14 January, 11 February, 11 March, 8 April and 13 May

Time: 10am–1pm

Venue: Disability Advice North East Suffolk
161 Rotterdam Road, Lowestoft, NR32 2EZ



Top tips to keep warm this winter

Although winter weather and snow can be fun for some, the cold is also associated with an increase in illness and injuries. Indeed, cold weather can be very harmful, especially for people aged 65 or older: it weakens the immune system, increases blood pressure, thickens the blood and lowers body temperature, increasing risks of high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes and chest infections.

If you have a long-term health condition like diabetes, heart or kidney disease, or have suffered a stroke, cold weather can make health problems like these far worse.

Heat the home: Heat your home to at least 18°C (65°F), if you can, you might prefer your living room to be slightly warmer. Remember to keep your window closed on winter nights as breathing in cold air can be bad for your health because it increases the risk of chest infections.

Be smart and energy efficient: To ensure that heat doesn't escape your home, fit draught proofing to seal any gaps around windows and doors, and make sure you have loft insulation, if necessary. If you have cavity walls, make sure they are insulated too. Don't forget to draw your curtains at dusk and to make sure your radiators are not obstructed by furniture or curtains.

Dress warmly: Wear lots of thin layers – clothes made from cotton, wool or fleecy fibres are particularly good at helping to maintain body heat and several layers trap warm air better than one bulky layer. Also wear good-fitting slippers and shoes with a grip to avoid slipping.

Move a little or a lot: Exercise is good for you all year round, not only will moving more keep you healthy, it can keep you warm over the colder winter months. If possible, try to move around at least once an hour. Remember to speak to your GP before starting any exercise plans to ensure they are tailored for your needs and abilities.

Source: NHS England

Martin Lewis, Money Saving Expert, has also put together a guide for 'Heating the Human not the Home'. He talks about saving energy and staying warm by using thermals, electric blankets and even USB powered hand warmers.

You can read his guide online at: <https://rb.gy/pl07tu>



Locally, our friends at the **Rural Coffee Caravan** have set up a page on their website dedicated to 'Helping people in Suffolk stay warm and well'.

Their Engagement Officers can provide specialist energy guidance on organisations and agencies who can be approached if you are struggling to stay warm in your home.

There is also a map of the 'warm spaces' that are free to attend around the county.

Visit their website at:

<https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/winter-warmth/>

Suffolk Libraries have this to say about their *Warm Welcome* cost of living campaign

"We know how difficult this winter will be with the rising cost of living. Suffolk Libraries is here to help anyone who needs support, with no judgement or stigma.

Our libraries have always provided safe, warm spaces for anyone to come and spend time in or find support and resources. This winter, as part of the national Warm Spaces campaign, we'll be bringing in new initiatives to help people stay warm, stay safe and stay connected.

How Suffolk Libraries can help:

Anyone is welcome to visit our libraries to find help and support. Our libraries have always been warm spaces where you can come and relax with no expectation to spend money or join in with activities. Our staff are always available if you need to speak to someone and be signposted to other resources.

Our libraries offer free WiFi and computer access, free period products, free events and activities for all ages, and free books, including our extensive eLibrary services. During these cold months, you can also visit the library to:

- Enjoy a free hot drink
- Pick up some warm clothes
- Charge your devices
- Collect free essential items

Different services will be available at different libraries depending on space and staff capacity. We advise you to contact your local library to see what support will be available to you.”

Suffolk Centres for Warmth

Suffolk Centres for Warmth is a programme by local councils, funded by Cadent (the local gas distributor) to support residents who may be struggling to keep their homes warm.

The project, delivered by East Suffolk Council, is helping households access extra support including the FREE Priority Services Register, energy advice, financial support and raising awareness of potential carbon monoxide sources in the home.



Faulty gas, coal, wood, and fuel oil appliances can release carbon monoxide (CO), a colourless, odourless and tasteless gas. This can make CO very difficult to detect. Exposure to CO can be very harmful and potentially fatal. The signs and symptoms are often non-specific and may simulate other more common conditions, such as flu-like illness, food poisoning or depression.

To reduce the risk, the recommendations are:

Fit an audible CO alarm in each habitable room with potential sources of CO (e.g. gas boiler, open fire or solid fuel stove)

Test the alarm regularly

Ensure gas appliances are installed correctly and serviced annually by a Gas Safe Registered Engineer

Ensure all chimneys and flues are cleaned annually to prevent blockages.

The Suffolk Centres for Warmth programme ensures that energy advice is available to households across Suffolk in vulnerable situations (including health conditions or limited finance).

The scheme raises awareness of carbon monoxide risks at home and provides free carbon monoxide alarms to homeowners without one.

Free Gas Safety checks are available to those homeowners struggling to afford to service their gas appliances.

The scheme also works with community groups in Suffolk to deliver Slow Cooker sessions – to help households reduce their food and energy bills.

To find out more, call 0333 016 2000 and ask for Suffolk Centres for Warmth.

Winter Fuel Payment Update

In July, the Government said that from this winter the Winter Fuel Payment will be restricted to those over state pension age and in receipt of one of the following benefits: Pension Credit, Universal Credit, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

The good news is that there is still time to claim Pension Credit and qualify for this year's Winter Fuel Payment. If you apply for Pension Credit by 21 December 2024 your claim can be backdated for up to three months and fall within the qualifying week to receive the Winter fuel Payment.

Over 800,000 people eligible for Pension Credit do not currently receive it.

Pension Credit is a top-up to your income. It is made up of two parts.

The first part is a Guarantee Credit providing you with an increase to your weekly income. If you receive less than £218.15 a week as a single person or less than £332.95 as a couple, it is worth checking to see if you qualify for some extra money.

The second part is a Savings Credit aimed at those who reached state pension age before April 2016 to give an extra boost to those who have saved for their retirement via savings, work or a private pension. This gives up to £17.01 a week for a single person and £19.04 for a couple.

Pension Credit is also a passport to getting further help such as a free television licence if you are aged 75 or over.

You can use the Pension Credit calculator:

<https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit-calculator>

to give you an estimate of how much you could get before applying.

How to apply for Pension Credit

Telephone: Claims for Pension Credit can be made by calling the free Pension Credit telephone claim line on 0800 99 1234 between 8am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

Online: Claims can be made online <https://apply-for-pension-credit.service.gov.uk>

Post: Print out and fill in the Pension Credit claim form www.gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim

Speak to your Community Worker for further assistance

Travel and Transport

We've produced this handy guide detailing local community transport options, to help you get out and about around the county.

Connecting Communities

Connecting Communities is a transport service provided by Suffolk County Council to provide rural transport provision across the county to those who might not have access to a regular bus service. When you need to make a journey and there's no public transport available locally, the service will collect you and connect you to an appropriate bus route or train link for onward travel.

The contracts to deliver these transport services have been won by local organisations that have many years of experience delivering services across Suffolk, working together with the local communities they support.

For general enquiries about Connecting Communities

Call: 0345 606 6171

Email: connecting.communities@suffolk.gov.uk

Website: <http://communities.suffolkonboard.com>

Community Transport Schemes (providing door-to-door transport)

As well as the concessions available on public transport, there are various other door-to-door transport services available such as Dial-A-Ride and Community Car Services, run mostly by a number of voluntary charity organisations - contact details are listed below.

Community bus, Community car services (CCS) and DIAL-A-RIDE (DAR) Services

BACT (Beccles Area Community Transport Services) offering Bus, DAR and CCS services Covers towns and villages in Waveney District – 01986 896896

Communities Together East Anglia – covers Ipswich and Mid Suffolk 01449 614271

CATS (Coastal Accessible Transport Services) offering bus, DAR and CCS Aldeburgh, Leiston, Framlingham, Saxmundham, Woodbridge – 01728 830516

FACTS (Felixstowe Area Community Transport Services) offering bus and CCS Felixstowe and surrounding area – 01394 282857

Hadleigh Community Transport Babergh – 01473 826242

The Voluntary Network West Suffolk – 01638 664304

Other smaller Community car services (CCS) and DIAL-A-RIDE (DAR) services

Aldeburgh/Leiston/Saxmundham (CCS) – 01728 831215

Botesdale, Rickinghall & surrounding area district community service – 01379 897109

Diss & Eye (DAR) (Borderhoppa) – 01379 854800

Driving Miss Daisy – 03330 146211

Eye Area (CCS) office open Mon and Fri 10.30–2.30 – 01379 871200

Felixstowe Area (CCS) – 01394 282857

Framlingham and Woodbridge Area (CCS) – 01728 621210

Halesworth Area (CCS) – 01986 874290

Southwold Area (CCS) – 01502 724549

Woodbridge Area (CCS) – 01728 621210

Helpline for Free Bus Pass

Call Suffolk County Council on 0345 600 0659 for information

Suffolk Concessionary Travel Voucher Scheme

If you are unable to travel by conventional public transport because of where you live or health or mobility difficulties, you may be eligible to receive travel vouchers to assist with the cost of taxis or community transport services. To find out more, contact Suffolk County Council on 0345 600 0659.

The Mid Suffolk Taxi Bus...

...is a brand-new service funded and supported by Mid Suffolk District Council.

The taxi bus provides circular routes from Stowmarket to Wattisham, Thurston, Bacton and Debenham. Also, a Debenham circular route via Eye.

For more information, please search for Mid Suffolk Taxi Bus online or phone 01449 866866

Volunteering for Suffolk Sight

You can make a difference. We welcome the opportunity to involve volunteers in all aspects of our work.

We have lots of different roles, from social clubs to social media, fundraising, administration, transport and befriending. There are plenty of ways throughout the organisation that you can help.

Contact us and we can tell you about our opportunities and discuss how best we can support each other.

Continued from inside front cover

They have extensive experience and knowledge of the opportunities and choices available to you. The list below highlights some of the areas we can support you with:

- Daily living and independence – aids and adaptations
- Low vision – magnification and assistive reading (with referrals to our low vision specialist where appropriate)
- Financial matters – benefits, grants and concessions
- Safety and security – in and around the home
- Tech solutions – gadget advice and demonstrations
- Social opportunities and befriending service
- Advice about services that can help you get out and about safely
- Children and Families Support Group

Supporting Us – Legacies

As an independent charity, we rely solely on donations, legacies and non-statutory grants to continue our work helping people in Suffolk with sight loss maintain independence and live fulfilling lives.

If you would like to leave a gift to **Suffolk Sight** in your will then you can be sure that you will be contributing to the work of the charity, helping us to reach and support even more people.



Suffolk Sight

**Disability Resource Centre
4 Bunting Road,
Bury St Edmunds, IP32 7BX**

Tel: 01284 748800

**19 Tower Street,
Ipswich, IP1 3BE**

Tel: 01473 611011

email: info@suffolksight.org.uk



Visit us on facebook

**Suffolk Sight is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Charity Number 1183608**

www.suffolksight.org.uk

Suffolk Sight is the sight loss charity for the county. Its purpose is to improve the lives of people who are affected by sight loss, throughout Suffolk.

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