

Changes to Suffolk County Council owned street lighting - Frequently asked questions

What is happening to my street lights?

From June 2011, Suffolk County Council will be implementing the Intelligent Street Lighting System to control the street lights. The system will allow part-night lighting and dimming to be introduced, which is when a street light can be switched off (or dimmed) for part of the night. The lights affected will be switched off (subject to exemption criteria detailed below) from midnight to 5.30am, similar to other local authorities across the country.

What is the background to this proposal?

In November 2009, the Roads and Transport Scrutiny Committee considered a paper on the general subject of "Street Lighting", but with the focus on potential energy and carbon savings through the use of an Intelligent Street Lighting System. Since then the council have carried out further market research and obtained Cabinet approval, both for the funding to install an Intelligent Street Lighting System in 2011/12 and an implementation Policy (ref Agenda Item 11, 12 October 2010 Cabinet), and completed the European Procurement Processes.

Why are we implementing the system?

By 2025, Suffolk aims to achieve a 60% reduction in CO₂. Introducing the system has the potential to deliver significant street lighting energy savings and a CO₂ reduction by April 2013. However significant progress must be made in order to meet the immediate target of 4% per annum reduction in CO₂ emissions, resulting from the council's operations. Implementing the system will also save the council at least £550,000 per year in energy costs.

What does the system do?

The 'Telensa' Intelligent Lighting System will provide computer based communication with individual street lights. It will allow part night operation, dimming (subject to lamp type), trimming (fine tuning to save a few more minutes around dawn and dusk depending upon actual light levels), remote monitoring and, critically, will have fully adjustable settings. This will allow us to change and have alternative settings for different days of the week, take account of British Summertime, or set to stay on for longer e.g. for events or at Christmas and New Year.

Why has my street been chosen?

All units six metres in height and below are to be switched off between the hours of midnight and 5:30am, with the following criteria requiring closer examination of whether lights should be kept on for a longer period:

- Lights at major junctions/roundabouts.
- In town centres with CCTV, high security businesses e.g. banks, areas of high night time pedestrian usage for example near nightclubs and train stations, outside community facilities or leisure centres.
- Areas where street lights are needed to reduce road accidents.
- Areas where there could be an increase in crime through reduced lighting, e.g. pubs and specific residential areas.
- Remote alleys linking residential streets.
- Near pedestrian crossings, footbridges, subways
- In public car parks.

- At bus stops.
- At level crossings, speed humps and traffic lights.
- Where there is sheltered housing for the elderly.

How much will this save the council?

Calculations based on current energy rate provide savings of £550,000 per annum. However it is anticipated the forthcoming year will see an increase to the energy rate of 22% that will further increase the savings. In addition, CO2 savings of approximately 4150 tonnes will be achieved.

Which areas will commence first?

Initially areas with the highest concentration of street lights to maximise savings will be targeted. Plans detailing towns and villages will be available from your local and parish council, highlighting the street lights in scope.

What about those street lights that are over six metres?

Where the street lights are over six metres, consideration will be given to dimming where funding exists. Dimming of the lights may be carried out where traffic flows are low and where a lower level of lighting will not affect road safety. The lights will be dimmed to 80% of their normal power between 9pm and 1am and to 60% of their normal power between 1am and 5am.

By how much will this lighting be dimmed?

Generally, lights will be dimmed to 80% power between 9pm and 1am and to 60% power between 1am and 5am

Why are you turning some lights off rather than just dimming them?

With dimming, we can only achieve a sufficient saving and return on our investment from the more powerful lights. As a rural county, there are limited units that fall within this category. However all future and replacement installations will contain appropriate equipment to enable dimming.

In the areas where the lights will be kept switched on, could you not just keep alternative lights off or one in three?

This option has been considered however it would be a detriment to road users to adjust to bright and dark lighting levels. By dimming major roads the uniformity of the light would not be compromised. In remote pedestrian areas, isolated units may also attract a congregation of people. Our intention is to trial the proposed part night lighting and welcome feedback from the public where consideration will then be given to adjusting the switching of some street lighting units.

How many lights will be affected?

It is difficult to say at this initial stage, however the main lighting units targeted for part night operation are generally of six metres and below in height (subject to the exemption criteria). We estimate that approximately up to 40,000 (73% of SCC owned units will be affected).

Will 30mph speed limits be affected if lights are switched off?

In accordance with the Road Traffic Regulations Act (1984), a 30mph speed limit automatically applies in any road containing a system of street lights placed no more than 200 yards apart, unless signposted with a different speed limit. There is no current law stating that these lights have to be switched on all night to be applicable. Therefore, motorists are advised that the usual 30mph speed limit will be in place regardless of whether the lights are switched on or not.

Can the council legally turn off the lights?

Yes. There is no statutory requirement on local authorities in the UK to provide public lighting, the law states:

The Highways Act empowers local authorities to light roads but does not place a duty to do so

- the council has a duty of care to road users and has an obligation to light obstructions on the highway
- the council has a statutory duty under the Highways Act to ensure the safety of the highway and this includes any lighting equipment placed on the highway
- the Electricity at Work Regulations impose a duty on owners and operators of electrical equipment to ensure its safety

Has a safety review been carried out on the roads affected?

We are aware of only one street lighting installation within the county that has been installed as an accident prevention measure. This is at Darsham Level Crossing and the recommendation from the Road Safety team is these units could also be part night lit. However we will continue to discuss the safety aspect as the system is deployed with colleagues in Road Safety and the Police. The system is fully adjustable and can be modified if required.

Won't parked cars on the road be a hazard if lights are turned off?

Residential areas where cars are likely to be parked on the road overnight are only being switched off between midnight and 5:30 am, when traffic flows are likely to be very low. Vehicle speeds are also likely to be low as these areas have 30 mph speed limits and speed is also constrained by the narrowness of the road and the presence of parked cars. Consequently, the risks of collision are considered to be small. However if you are parking your vehicle over-night on the road, you do have a responsibility to park in a manner to ensure other road users can see your vehicle.

Won't this just increase crime and traffic accidents within the county?

Evidence from other authorities in which these measures have been introduced, indicates levels of crime and numbers of traffic accidents has not increased; in fact a reduction has occurred.

The safety and wellbeing of residents and motorists is important and has always been the highest consideration of this project. The council will continue to work closely with Suffolk Police, parish and town councils on the detailed proposals throughout the project.

Any accidents and crime in affected areas will be closely monitored throughout the project and regular meetings will be held with the emergency services.

It should be noted that part night lighting was previously in operation within the county however at that time due to rental costs associated with the time-switches and cheaper energy prices, keeping the street lights on all night was more cost effective.

Where do I go for more information or provide feedback?

Website – www.suffolk.gov.uk/streetlighting

Email – streetlighting@suffolk.gov.uk

Write – Street Lighting Team, 5th floor Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich IP1 2BX