

SCC Engaged Communities

# Suffolk Tours

Summer 2023 review

by Alan Cutting, Project Manager



## Introduction

On behalf of Together for Ipswich, and through paid minibus hire and volunteer drivers and hosts, the Suffolk Tours programme is designed to take refugees and asylum seekers on one-day guided tours to places of key cultural and historic interest within Suffolk.

Whilst we recognise that the core requirements of (e.g.) the Ukrainian refugee community are to “learn English, find employment and secure housing”, the social and cultural impact of the Suffolk Tours bring a holistic warmth, connectivity and relationship to this and the asylum-seeking community, and helps establish them in a contextual and cultural awareness of - and integration with - the region they presently call home. The tours are therefore central to the current and anticipated on-going needs of these communities.

## Pre-programme preparation and consultation.

Supported by Community Hub leaders in Ipswich, Kesgrave, Woodbridge and Felixstowe, I spent four weeks seeking the views of our guests (asylum seekers and refugees) as to *where* they would like the tours to go, and *when* (i.e. which days of the week). This was by means of questionnaires and 1:1 and group conversations at the Kesgrave, Hope Church and The Sanctuary Community Hubs (see Appendix One).

In this way we were reassured of the priorities as seen by our guests, although (probably due to their limited knowledge of the area) it was interesting to see how many of them defaulted to asking us to arrange things as we saw fit. By mid-July, I was ready to publish our summer itinerary and joining instructions (see Appendix Two).

I underestimated the time it would take to prepare these trips. Before even one trip had commenced, I had put in about 60 hours of work setting up twelve tours for this summer - three dedicated to those seeking asylum, and the other nine for the refugee community (94% of whom were Ukrainian). Well before they happened, each tour became fully booked, with a waiting list set up in case of cancellations.

## The need for flexibility.

There were almost always 'last minute' cancellations and changes, reflecting the fact that not everyone shares our UK 'plan-ahead culture', and decisions by Ukrainians and our asylum-seeking communities are often made on the day. However, we were still able to fill 96% of the seats over the twelve trips, with a few people turning up 'on spec' at pick-up points 'just in case' they could join.

## Vehicles and drivers.

Vehicles and drivers were supplied free of charge by Ipswich School (7 tours) and St Joseph's College (2 tours), with just three other tours requiring us to hire vehicles from John Grose. These were driven by volunteer members and friends of Burlington Church.



Consequently, and by agreement with SCC Engaged Communities, the schools' wonderful donation of nine vehicle-days enabled us to free up significant funds that we were able to re-invested into boat trips, and gaining access to museums, colleges, castles etc on the tours. I was also able to provide drinks and ice creams on most trips, and – as they had no opportunity to pack their own lunches - lunch for those seeking asylum (See Appendix Five).

## Separate tours for those seeking asylum.

Although these different ethnic groups tend to mix very well at one of our Community Hubs (the Hope Church English Conversation Class), we decided for the Suffolk Tours to keep these two groups separate, as they had significantly different needs and expectations. Having undertaken the tours, this became quite obviously the right decision.

The asylum-seeker groups were exclusively male, often boisterous, humorous, wanting to play loud music, dance, play cards and drink Coke! In contrast, the refugee group (almost all Ukrainians) was predominantly women and children, fairly quiet and family orientated, wanted to experience more heritage and culture, and drink coffee!



Due to these diverse needs and requirements, we created two overlapping but separate risk assessments for the two groups of guests, and added one additional (assistant) host for the asylum seeker tours.

I worked in close partnership with Molly Lesson (the Manager at The Sanctuary) in the delivery of the three tours dedicated to the asylum seekers. One tour was to Snape and Thorpeness, the second to Cambridge (a Suffolk + Tour!), and the third – delayed a couple of weeks due to sickness – visited Leiston Abbey and Walberswick. All three trips were extremely well received, the guests being lavish with their praise and appreciation. In fact, as we walked back to the bus at the end of our day in Cambridge, one guest – a young Afghan man seeking asylum in the UK - said to me, "Alan, you will never, *ever*, fully understand how much today has meant to us".

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We had one tricky incident on the Thorpeness day, when one guest dived into the sea and cut his head, involving an unexpected trip back to Ipswich A&E by the driver (the Ipswich School headmaster!). Thankfully the injured man was fine and, simply as a byproduct, this gave us the opportunity to test out our risk assessment, which thankfully proved to be adequate for the occasion.

### The “front-loading” of tours.

It would appear that we have seriously front-loaded a grant that is actually for the delivery of tours over next thirteen months. This is true, and reflects that fact that for both groups of guests, significant uncertainties remain as to their mid-term future. If the war in Ukraine ends, and if the Home Office speed up the asylum application processes, both these groups could potentially and quite rapidly move on. And if they *do* remain in Ipswich, find jobs and homes, and thus become more fully integrated, the impact of our Suffolk Tours will fade over time. For this reason I have so far focused quite heavily on this (2023) summer. However, I remain confident of delivering at least a few more Suffolk Tours throughout the time frame of the grant.



## The kindness of many agencies.

Suffolk County Council Engaged Communities kindly funded Suffolk Tours through their “Refugee and Asylum Seeker Integration” funding initiative. Expected outcomes included:

- Refugees brought together to strengthen their supportive network – such as via creative or sports activities.
- Refugees and Suffolk people brought together to increase their network of contacts.
- Community integration and understanding of cultural distinctiveness – reduced feeling of community isolation, less of them and us.
- Reduced feelings of physical isolation – overcome physical access issues in rural areas.
- Activities that recognise and seeks to address mental health stresses and anxiety.
- English language practiced in a supportive environment.
- Evidence of cultural legacy stemming from this a unique historic situation.

Although Together for Ipswich seeks to be an engagement vehicle for all 80+ churches in Ipswich, in terms of church involvement, Suffolk Tours was primarily supported by Burlington Church (who hosted the bid, helped with promotion and provided the management and some volunteer drivers), and indirectly by St Mary-le-Tower (who oversee The Sanctuary Day Centre, whose Project Manager coordinated the three tours for asylum seekers).

Suffolk Tours hugely benefited from free or reduced entry and additional support from many agencies, including:

- Ipswich School
- St Joseph’s College, Ipswich
- John Grose Ford, Ipswich
- English Heritage
- National Trust
- King’s College, Cambridge
- Dunwich Museum
- The Swan, Lavenham
- The Meare, Thorpeness
- Radar Museum, Bawdsey
- Suffolk Punch Trust, Hollesley
- Harbour Master, Felixstowe Ferry

## The places we visited.

Typically, we sought to go to places less easy to access by public transport. Locations where visits were arranged included:

- Snape Maltings (concert hall, sculptures, river walks)
- Leiston Abbey
- Thorpeness (beach, boating on The Meare, visiting the windmill and The House in the Clouds, pony and trap rides)
- Aldeburgh (walks through town and along promenade, galleries)
- Dunwich (beach, Museum, Leper Hospital, Greyfriars Monastery and ‘Last Grave’, heath)

- Sizewell (beach)
- Walberswick (beach)
- Orford (Castle and quay)
- Hollesley Bay (Suffolk Punch trust)
- Bawdsey (ferry and river boat trips, Radar Museum)
- Framlingham (Castle and market square)
- Saxtead Green (Post Mill)
- Kersey (village walk)
- Lavenham (Guildhall, The Swan, De Vere House)
- Long Melford (Hall)
- Cambridge (Fitzwilliam Museum, and King's, Emmanuel, Christ's and Sidney Sussex College's)

### The breakdown of guest numbers.

176 places were available, and 168 places were taken (last minute cancellations accounted for the eight empty seats).

Those participating included:

- women (76)
- men (47)
- children (45)

They came from:

- |                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| • Ukraine (122)    | • Eritrea (3)    |
| • Afghanistan (21) | • Kuwait (3)     |
| • Egypt (6)        | • Ethiopia (2)   |
| • Sudan (6)        | • Azerbaijan (1) |
| • Iran (4)         |                  |

Several people were able to go on more than one trip. These guests were accepted on the basis of their availability at short notice, the size of their family, and a few other pastoral factors. I asked those who had attempted to sign up for more than three trips to respect those who were unable to find a place, and several kindly made way for newcomers.

As a result, five asylum seekers and 34 refugees went on two or more trips, meaning that a total of 36 different asylum seekers and 72 different refugees were able to go on at least one trip.



### Lessons learned and recommendations.

I am planning to offer a simple WhatsApp feedback opportunity for all guests, although 1:1 conversations and anecdotes remain the most effective way of gathering response. I also asked our drivers to reflect on the day they spent with us, and whether they would do anything differently. Responses have been overwhelmingly positive, with a little discussion on the pros and cons of keeping the group together versus letting individuals roam free at different places of interest. I think we struck a good and wholesome balance in this respect.

One can see from the stories (Appendix Three) and responses (Appendix Four) how much these tours are a) needed and b) appreciated, especially when one considers how Eastern Slavs (i.e. the Ukrainian community) do not tend to be very demonstrative in expressing their gratitude.

Tour organisers and facilitators should not under-estimate just how long it takes to plan such trips. Detailed liaison with funders, minibus owners, drivers, agencies offering access, and the guests, all takes time and close attention.

Tour organisers and facilitators should not under-estimate just how long it takes to plan such trips. Detailed liaison with funders, minibus owners, drivers, agencies offering access, and the guests, all takes time and close attention. In relatively recent years I created and managed an extensive short-term team's programme that took groups of volunteers all over

the developing world, but even with that c.v. and experience, I was surprised at how much time our Suffolk Tours took to present well. A small team would have enabled the workload to be shared.

Whilst consultation with one's service users is always very important, when the client group is new to the area, one shouldn't expect them to have many strong opinions, for example, on where to go, how long to spend there, etc. This rightly remains the role of the host who on one hand should be clear with their research and their instructions, yet also flexible and ready to change schedule, timings etc through being sensitive to the specific needs of the guests (e.g. young children, tiredness, minor sickness such as headaches, lack of understanding instructions in English etc). The need for clarity, flexibility, grace, and the capacity to make last minute decisions are therefore necessary pre-requisites of those who manage and host such trips.

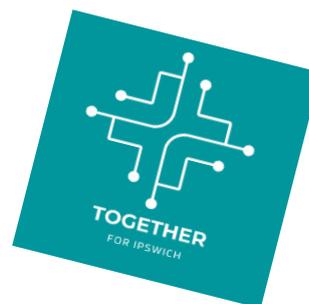


## Appendix One – the Consultation Process.



# Suffolk Tours are back!

Last year Together for Ipswich was able to offer a programme called **SUFFOLK TOURS** for the local Ukrainian refugee community. These were one-day minibus trips to various places of interest around Suffolk and, apart from being great fun, were a means of helping to inform our Ukrainian guests about Suffolk's culture and heritage, and to help integrate them into the place they now call home.



We have now been given funding to provide 15 more Suffolk Tours between 1 July 2023 and 31 August 2024. Refugees from Ukraine, as well as those who have arrived from Hong Kong, and those seeking asylum and presently living in Ipswich hotels, are all welcome to apply at no cost.

Last year we did trips to Kersey, Lavenham, Hadleigh, Bury St Edmunds, Snape, Thorpeness, Aldeburgh, and Sutton Hoo. We can repeat some of them again, and offer some new places as well. We could even cross the Suffolk borders and go to Cambridge, or Essex, or Norfolk.

Where would you like to go, and when? Tour dates have yet to be decided upon.

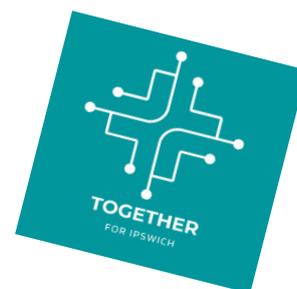
Please complete this questionnaire and return it either to Nicola at Hope Centre, Molly at The Sanctuary, Catherine or Natalie at All Saints Kesgrave, or to Alan Cutting, or write to him at [ahcutting@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ahcutting@yahoo.co.uk) or 07834 693144 (WhatsApp) by 24 June.

I would be interested in joining some Suffolk Tours that go...		Yes	No
1	To the coast (e.g. Southwold, Walberswick, Thorpeness, Aldeburgh, Orford, Felixstowe)		
2	To Suffolk rural villages (including short walking tours, visiting churches, castles etc)		
3	To other towns (these could be for events, or shopping, or museum visits etc)		
If you answered yes to more than one of the above, in which order of priority would you put them? (e.g. 1, 3, 2)			
The best times for me to go on a Suffolk Tour would be		Yes	No
A	At weekends (daytime)		
B	Midweek, during school holidays (daytime)		
C	Midweek, during term time (within school hours)		
D	Evenings		
If you answered yes to more than one of the times, in which order of priority would you put them? (e.g. B, C, A, D)			
<b>Do you have any other requests or suggestions?</b>			
<b>Please add me to Suffolk Tours email and WhatsApp groups to stay in touch with the plans</b>			
Please PRINT your name here:			
Your email address:			
Your WhatsApp number:			
Your signature:			

## Appendix Two – the Schedule and Sign-up Process.



# Suffolk Tours 2023



**Together for Ipswich** is offering a programme of free-to-access **SUFFOLK TOURS** for the refugee and asylum-seeking communities who live in and around Ipswich. **SUFFOLK TOURS** are one-day minibus trips to various places of interest around Suffolk – usually to places that are hard to access via public transport. Apart from being great fun, joining with us on a **SUFFOLK TOUR** is a means of learning more about Suffolk's culture and heritage, and will help to integrate you into the place you now call home.

Thanks to Together for Ipswich volunteers, and support from Suffolk County Council (Engaged Communities Group), English Heritage, Ipswich School and St Joseph's College, refugees from Ukraine, those who have arrived on a BN(O) visa from Hong Kong, and those seeking asylum and presently living in Ipswich hotels, are all welcome to apply, at no cost.

## Where are we going, and when?

Trip	When	Focus	Where to	Depart	Leave	Comment
3	Thursday 27 July	Coast and heath	Leiston Abbey, Sizewell, Dunwich.	Hope Church	09.30	Walking, museum, abbey ruins, possible sea swimming.
4	Saturday 29 July	Castles and windmill	Orford, Framlingham, Saxtead Green.	Hope Church	09.30	Some walking required, and climbing castle steps.
6	Friday 4 August	Coast, swim, walk, history	(Orford?), Dunwich, Walberswick.	Hope Church	09.30	Walking, museum, abbey ruins, possible sea swimming.
7	Thursday 10 August	Ancient villages	Hadleigh, Kersey, Lavenham (Bury?).	Hope Church	09.30	Some walking required through historic villages.
8	Sunday 13 August	Castle and coast	Framlingham, Thorpeness, Aldeburgh	Hope Church	09.30	Walking, climbing castle steps, possible sea swimming.
9	Thursday 17 August	Coast (beach and walks)	Snape, Aldeburgh Thorpeness.	Hope Church	09.30	Some walking required. Sea swimming optional.
10	Sunday 20 August	Coast (swim, walk, history)	Dunwich, Walberswick.	Hope Church	09.30	Walking, museum, abbey ruins, possible sea swimming.
11	Thursday 24 August	History walking tour	Felixstowe (Port and Ferry).	Hope Church	09.30	Walking, history tour, possible sea swimming.
12	Thursday 31 August	University city tour	Cambridge.	Hope Church	09.30	Walking, university, art gallery.

## Detail

Minibuses leave Hope Church at 9.30. We can pick up from Kesgrave and Woodbridge - contact Alan for details. The minibus travel is free, and entrance fees for refugees to castles, windmills and abbeys are also free. You are advised to bring a packed lunch and plenty to drink. Although we will also aim to stop near places to eat (and toilets!), food and drinks at cafes and fish and chip shops will be at your own expense. You will be returned to your pick-up point by about 4.30-5.00pm.

## How to apply

WhatsApp Alan on **07834 693144** stating your **full name, which trip you are asking to go on, the number of family members you wish to come, any special needs you have, and the age of any children under 18. We must have your WhatsApp number** in order to confirm details and any last-minute changes (e.g. due to bad weather, sickness, or other unforeseen circumstances).

Alan will confirm your place on the trip, or (if fully booked) will try to offer you an alternative.

**If you have to cancel, please let Alan know as soon as possible, so your place can be taken by someone else.**

## Appendix Three - Stories from the Tours

### Drawing Ukraine

The young family – mother and two girls, 7 and 2 - moved to Ipswich soon after the commencement of the war, and made their first visit back to Ukraine to see their family in August. Their return journey to England involved undertaking a 19-hour bus journey from Kharkiv to Warsaw, then a flight to Stansted. They were obviously tired when I picked them up from the airport for the final leg of their long journey home, but they were seemingly peaceful and not too negatively impacted by the devastation they saw and heard whilst in a city that borders the front line.

The very next day they were up early, and were first on the minibus for our Suffolk Tour of Kersey, Lavenham and Long Melford. That afternoon, in the gardens of Long Melford Hall, the two-year-old found some paper and crayons, and said to her mother, “I want to draw Ukraine”. Her mother drew the now-famous blue and yellow flag of Ukraine, and the little girl carried on from there, ‘drawing Ukraine’. And this is what she drew.



### The House in the Clouds

Nadiia\*, a 13-year-old girl who has been attending an online school in Kiev since coming to the UK, has an English textbook with a picture of The House in the Clouds on one of the chapter headings. Nadiia's teacher had asked her if she knew where this strange house was, and she'd shrugged her shoulders and said, “No, England's a big country”. So to walk up a tiny lane in Thorpeness and find it standing there in all its glory was an amazing discovering for her. Nadiia messaged her teacher straight away, with a picture of her standing in front of it!

\*name changed

A few such stories and interviews from our trips are included on my website at <https://www.cuttingacross.com/ukraine.html>

## Appendix Four - Post-tour Comments.

KG: Really Appreciate the Love and support Ms Molly for organizing such a beautiful memorable day for all of us. Thanks so much 🙌 big respect and Love ❤️ 😊

IB: Thank you very much Alan for a wonderful trip! Lots of happy emotions! 😊

TZ: Alan, huge thanks for this amazing trip 😊 we really enjoyed and tired. And thanks to Andres for driving us 😊

IZ: Thank you Alan for a great day. Thank you for the interesting excursions, unforgettable impressions of beautiful people and pleasant communication!

Thank you so much for these trips - it is such a holiday for the soul, and just an unforgettable experience!

IV: Thank you very much Alan and Charlotta! 😊 It was a very interesting tour!

KZ: Thank you so much Alan) Lots of experiences, fond memories and beautiful views. Thank you for an informative and interesting holiday. With pleasure looking forward to a new trip!!!! 🙌 😊

IN: Thank you, Alan. It was really interesting trip and new experience for me 😊

AJ: Alan, thank you very much for invited us to this memorable trip 😊

IZ: Thanks Alan. It was a beautiful day! I saw a lot of interesting historical places and the communication was great! 🙌 🚤 🏛️ 🏠 😊

Honestly, the best trip I went on since I came to Europe.

TZ: Thank you!!!!

AJ: Thank you so much for today and photos 🙌 🙌

IR: Thank you very much, Alan.

AA: Alan, thank you so much for organising such a great trip! It was very fascinating. 😊 😊

IN: Thank you, Alan. It was new amazing trip with unusual villages for me. I'll waiting for next travel 😊 Kind regards.

HV: Thanks a lot Alan to you for today's wonderful tour that you organized for us. Thank you very much for such an interesting and exciting journey. 😊

TK: Thank you very much, looking forward to another interesting trip.

VY: Alan, thank you a lot for this wonderful day and new positive emotions 🌞

VY: I fell in love in Thorpeness beach.

TM: Once again, thank you very much to Alan and John for this wonderful trip 🥰

VR: Thank you so much for these trips - it is such a holiday for the soul, and just an unforgettable experience!

AS: Pardon. Honestly, the best trip I went on since I came to Europe.

This is a very good opportunity for me and my daughter to visit such interesting places. Thanks a lot!

TS: This is a very good opportunity for me and my daughter to visit such interesting places. Thanks a lot!

LS: Alan, thank you so much!

NK: Alan, thank you so much!



SW: Thank you very much!!! ❤️ GBUA ❤️

MK: It was amazing! Thank you so much for our experience and emotions today! Kids enjoy this day a lot!

IV: Thanks a lot Alan. 😊 Had a wonderful trip!

TZ: Thank you Alan for amazing trip and day! 😊❤️

HV: Thank you so much for a wonderful trip! 😊

AF: Really Appreciate the Love and support Ms Molly for organizing such a beautiful memorable day for all of us. Thanks so much 🙌 big respect and Love ❤️ 😊

TM: Thank you for the detailed information, Alan 🌸 Looking forward to having another one amazing tour!

AB: Клаааааа! Яка гарна компашка!! (Claaas! What a beautiful group of people!) ❤️

VY: Alan, thanks you all for this beautiful day, and a lot of new emotions and places 🌟

OV: Thanks Alan. It was an amazing trip. Everything was very interesting and exciting. Our kids were as happy as can be. And they constantly tell me that they want more. Thank you for this magical weekend.

SK: Thank you for this trip, your time and lovely day. 🙌 One of Max's memories was the rabbit as well. 🐰 🎨

It was a beautiful day! I saw a lot of interesting historical places and the communication was great! 🙌 🚤 🏛️ 🏠 😊

IZ Thank you Alan for a wonderful day at amazing historic castles and a wonderful boat trip! Thanks to the bus driver for driving us and all the wonderful Ukrainians for the company. Happy Independence Day of Ukraine!

NB: Thank you Alan, thank you Steven, thank you dear Ukrainians!

MK: Thank you so much! Great day, despite of the weather 😊 🙌

TZ: Alan thank you much! 😊 🙌 ❤️

NK: Alan, thank you so much for a fantastic tour!

NK: Alan, thank you so much for this lovely day and all previous our trips in August. Thanks a lot to all drivers and to all Ukrainians that we've spent time with. Wish everyone a nice evening, see you soon!

IV: Thank you very much Alan, for our wonderful trips. 😊 It was incredible and very interesting!

TK: Dear Alan, thank you very much for organising the trips this summer! It was a pleasure to spend time with each of you! Have a nice evening and see you all again!

IB: Dear Alan, Thank you for this wonderful trip. Also, thank you for everything you do for us. Thanks, Dean for giving us such a great ride and thank you so much for driving us all the way home! We loved the wonderful time we had thanks to you.

## Appendix Five – budget summary

Our originally agreed budget (for the delivery of fifteen tours) was:

- Minibus hire £1200.00 (12 trips = £960)
- Fuel for minibus trips £480.00 (12 trips = £384.00)
- On board water and soft drinks £510.00 (12 trips = £408.00)
- Entry and event fees £960.00 (12 trips = £768.00)

Due to the kindness of Ipswich School and St Joseph's College to offer the free loan of minibuses and drivers, potentially enabling us to reinvest the funds into enabling access to locations and events, and offer some subsistence for our guests, I had requested from the panel some flexibility in the budget sub-headings. This was agreed and confirmed in an email from Rory Lankester on 7 July.

Our actual expenditure over these first twelve trips was:

- Minibus hire £531.30 (55%)
- Fuel for minibus trips £173.16 (45%)
- On board water and soft drinks / Subsistence £859.70 (211%)
- Entry and event fees £124.49 (16%)
- Other £15.50

Our overall expenditure as at 1 September 2023 is £1704.15 (68%)

Future trips are anticipated to cost more per trip due to the need to hire each minibus and pay for entry fees, but we are well on course financially to deliver more than the fifteen tours that we budgeted for.