

BROMESWELL PARISH COUNCIL
SCC MONTHLY NEWSLETTER – JUNE 2023

Suffolk Trading Standards constructs case against brazen builder

A builder who received in the region of £592,000 from customers for contracts which were never completed pleaded guilty to his crimes at Hendon Magistrates Court yesterday.

Alan Gary Middleton, 45, of Merlin Close, Rugby, traded as GK Builders, G & K Builders, Middleton Building Services, AGM Custom Construction and AGM Bespoke Construction Limited, and operated across Suffolk, previously living in Saxmundham.

Suffolk Trading Standards began their investigation into Middleton after receiving reports of customers who had paid for building work to be carried out only to have this never completed.

To placate his victims, Middleton advised that he “would only work on one property at a time”, but consumers quickly became aware that he was working on multiple projects to the detriment of their own building works.

The investigation also uncovered that Middleton was using various tactics to extract more money from customers, including falsifying supplier invoices and using a fake VAT number, with one customer asked to pay £25,000 in VAT alone.

In addition, he had declared himself bankrupt but failed to disclose this to consumers despite this being a legal obligation.

Once Middleton realised that Suffolk Trading Standards was investigating him, he reverted to using the name Alan Middleton for business, having previously used Gary Middleton.

At a hearing at Hendon Magistrates Court (acting as a Nightingale Crown Court) yesterday (Tuesday, 6 June), Gary Middleton pleaded guilty to 4 offences of Fraud by False Representation under the Fraud Act 2006 and 1 offence of theft.

At a previous hearing Gary Middleton and his wife Katie Middleton, 34, of Merlin Close, Rugby both pleaded guilty to two counts of fraudulently obtain a mortgage for themselves worth £400k. Both will appear in court for sentencing on 14th July.

Anyone who believes they may have been the victim of a fraudulent or substandard trader should contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 0808 223 1133.

Suffolk Fire Service to bring control room back to the County

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has announced plans to create a new fire control centre here in Suffolk.

Since October 2011, Suffolk has shared a control room with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service in Huntingdon. The joint project has worked well, saving both fire services money and enabling greater cross-border resource sharing.

However, the company behind a project to deliver a new IT system, initiated in 2019, has run into technical and financial problems, causing a significant delay. This, in addition to advancements in technology, has led to the decision to bring fire control back into the county by the end of 2024.

A new, Suffolk-based control room, with its own market, tried and tested fire engine mobilisation software, will mean modernised IT systems and improved public and firefighter safety in Suffolk.

The proposed new control centre will be brought to Suffolk County Council's Cabinet for approval in September 2023.

Help for Suffolk Pre-payment Meter customers

A package of support has been created for pre-payment meter customers in Suffolk who are struggling with their energy bills.

Warm Homes Suffolk is a Suffolk-wide Council partnership service, delivering energy efficiency support to low-income households affected by cost-of-living pressures. Supported by Suffolk's Collaborative Communities Board and funding from Public Health Suffolk's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), the service is now able to offer specific help for households struggling to pay their energy bills via a pre-payment meter, in addition to its existing support.

The support covers the whole of Suffolk and is available for all residents, whether they are in social housing, council tenants, owner occupiers or private renters.

The Warm Homes Suffolk Service can check eligibility and support applications for grants to increase household energy efficiency, with measures such as loft and wall insulation to air source heat pumps, draught-proofing and more.

It is estimated that more than 24,000 people in Suffolk are pre-payment meter customers.

The service will work with each individual to understand the pressures on their finances and the impact this is having on their lives. The service can carry out a home visit, as well as providing advice over the phone and by email.

The COMF funding of £180,000 will enable this project to run for 12 months to provide the following:

- Income maximisation (through grants and benefits)
- Budgeting advice
- Help understanding bills and heating systems
- Support to reduce energy expenditure (By promoting social tariffs and support to switch suppliers)
- Improving household energy efficiency (By installing insulation, draught proofing, heating systems and solar panels)
- Facilitating switch away from prepaid meters if appropriate

Pre-payment meter customers who would like support can contact prepay@eastssuffolk.gov.uk to find out more, or call: **Prepay West at 07769 365796**, or **Prepay East at 07769 366229**.

Referrals can be made directly from households, the voluntary sector and professionals to find prepay households who can benefit from an independent look at their bills.

Warm Homes Suffolk also offers support and advice for residents who are not pre-payment meter customers. To find out more about the support on offer, visit: <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/>

Cllr Bobby Bennett added: “Further details of the cost-of-living support available for Suffolk residents and organisations can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/costofliving.”

Letting agent who lost landlords thousands disqualified as company director

Suffolk Trading Standards has successfully stopped a Newmarket business owner from being a company director for 8 years following his sentencing last year for defrauding customers by over £80,000.

Francis Smart, aged 46, and proprietor of Smart Residential Letting Agents, pleaded guilty to two counts of fraud in respect of retaining rent and deposits under S1 Fraud Act 2006 in August 2022 after it emerged that he had broken the law by pocketing tenancy deposits instead of placing these into a Deposit Protection Scheme.

He was subsequently sentenced to 32 months per offence, to run concurrently, by a judge at Ipswich Crown Court last summer, who commented that Smart’s actions were “particularly sad” adding that he had “betrayed those who trusted you and caused a lot of distress”.

Officers from Suffolk Trading Standards worked alongside colleagues from the National Trading Standards Tri-Regional Investigations Team to secure the conviction

after more than 30 witnesses alleged that they had faced substantial losses after using Smart's services.

Both Trading Standards teams also applied to have Mr Smart disqualified as a company director, with a judge agreeing to this for a period of 8 years at Ipswich Crown Court yesterday (Thursday, 15 June).

By law, a deposit must be placed in a Deposit Protection Scheme within 30 days of the landlord receiving it, and landlords are also obligated to provide information to tenants about where their deposit is held.

Anyone who suspects that an individual or business is fraudulently trading can report their suspicions in confidence by contacting Citizens Advice on 0808 223 1133.

Ancestry appointed to digitise Suffolk's popular family and local history sources

More than 400 years of fascinating historical documents held at Suffolk Archives are to be digitised and made available online, thanks to an agreement between Suffolk County Council and Ancestry.

Suffolk Archives will work alongside the family history website Ancestry to create high-quality, full-colour digital images of millions of baptism, marriage and burial records from parishes within the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

The earliest records being digitised date back to 1538 and include events in the lives of notable historical figures, such as the 1776 baptism of landscape artist John Constable, and the 1846 burial of Thomas Clarkson who devoted his life to the abolition of slavery.

It is hoped that Suffolk's main parish records will be published online in early 2025 with other collections of local interest to follow. Public access will be free of charge in Suffolk Archives branches or at any Suffolk Library. Anyone with an Ancestry subscription will also be able to access the records as part of their research from their own computer or device.

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Sudbury man guilty of selling fake DVDs

John Williams, 72 of Pot Kiln Road, Great Cornard, has pleaded guilty to two offences related to the sale, supply, and manufacture of counterfeit DVDs.

John Williams, 72 of Pot Kiln Road, Great Cornard, has pleaded guilty to two offences related to the sale, supply, and manufacture of counterfeit DVDs.

Williams first became known to Suffolk Trading Standards when they received a report of fake cult and classic DVDs being sold on a website. Test purchases were

carried out with the Trade Mark and Copyright holder confirming them to be counterfeit. Titles examined included Wonder Woman 1984, Shazam, X Men Apocalypse and the TV programmes The Strange World of Gurney Slade and Dial 999. Over 40,000 DVDs were seized from Mr Williams' home in October 2021 alongside computers, disc burners, a colour photocopier with some printouts of DVD box paper insert sleeves and address label stickers.

Forensic analysis of the seized computers found that Williams had sold fake DVDRs when attending numerous Film and TV fairs, mainly in London and that he had a wide network of customers he sold discs to, both in the UK and abroad.

Appearing at Ipswich Crown Court today, John Williams pleaded guilty to one offence under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1998 and one under the Trademark Act 1994. The sentencing will be on 24 July 2023.

Councillor Andrew Reid, cabinet member responsible for Public Health and Public Protection, said:

"I congratulate Trading Standards who worked hard to bring this matter to Court, and I would like to extend my thanks to the Film Content Protection Agency and the National Trading Standards eCrime team for their assistance."

Anyone wanting to report the sale of illegal goods should contact Trading Standards via Citizens Advice Consumer Service at **0808 223 1133**.

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