

District Councillor's Report – July 2020

Discretionary Business Grants

The first round of applications for the Discretionary Grant received 143 eligible applications. There are still applications being processed so any businesses who received a claim reference will be contacted to confirm whether or not their application has been successful. The second phase of the Discretionary Grant, aims to reach more businesses who have been unable to access any financial support including retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with a rateable value between £51k and £71k, Early Years providers and small businesses who have three or more employees.

Mid Suffolk District Council to Study Green Development Opportunities

Mid Suffolk District Council and the Greater South East Energy Hub (GSEEH) have announced up to £40,000 match funding for a study into low carbon opportunities for Gateway 14. The announcement marks the first time GSEEH has supported a Local Authority project to explore how low and zero carbon initiatives can be integrated into new developments. It is hoped that the findings of the study can be used to share learnings and best practice across the region.

The funding is part of several initiatives that demonstrate Mid Suffolk District Council's commitment to achieving their ambition of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The council, working alongside Jaynic, the development partner for Gateway 14 Limited, will appoint a low carbon heat and power specialist to investigate low carbon opportunities for the site. This work will take place alongside the master planning work ensuring environmental sustainability is considered from the start of the development. The collaboration between the Council, Gateway 14 Limited and GSEEH may provide opportunities for further external funding and investment.

Located on the A14 outside Stowmarket, Gateway 14 is a major new development that will provide up to 2.3 million sq. ft of mixed-use business park for warehousing and logistics and an innovation cluster within the 'Space to Innovate' enterprise zone site. A planning application for Gateway 14 is expected to be submitted by the end of 2020, to enable a phased development on the 156-acre site. The masterplan layout is still being developed, however the site could accommodate logistics buildings, headquarter offices, R&D campus style buildings and support a range of high growth businesses, while also maximising opportunities for inward investment, job creation and wider community benefits.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Blueprint for a Sustainable future

Councillors have approved a raft of environmental measures to help Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils achieve their ambition of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The agreed actions will form the councils' first Carbon Reduction Management Plan, setting out how they aim to fulfil their ambitions of becoming carbon neutral within the next ten years. The actions are the first steps in achieving the long term objective to reduce the councils' current emissions of approximately 5,452 tonnes (Mt) of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) per year, looking into how best to invest in order to reduce this to net zero.

The proposals follow the climate emergency motions passed by both councils in 2019 and the creation of the Joint Environment and Climate Change Task Force. The task force has taken expert advice on which areas to target first for the greatest impact – working with Groundwork Suffolk to analyse current emissions and develop recommendations.

Headline proposals include:

- Exploring the use of the councils' owned or controlled commercial estates, for renewable energy generation schemes, solar ports and battery storage
- Working with the councils' leisure providers to move towards both green tariff energy, and the buildings becoming less energy intensive to operate
- Transitioning existing diesel-powered waste and fleet vehicles to a more sustainable fuel source such as waste vegetable oil, with a longer term ambition with partners to introduce electric or hydrogen fuelled vehicles
- Identifying further efficiencies and opportunities for waste collections in line with the Government's anticipated Environment Bill
- Introducing an electric vehicle charging plan, cooperatively with our wider partners, to explore opportunities for expanding EV charging infrastructure in the districts
- Actively encouraging a digital-first culture at the councils and exploring incentives to reduce staff mileage
- Increasing tree and hedgerow planting and coverage across the district
- Ensuring new and current council housing is as efficient and environmentally friendly as possible, whilst also working more proactively with private housing developers to build sustainable communities
- Working with partners to improve the infrastructure necessary to increase sustainable travel in our key towns and beyond
- Continue to work on Suffolk-wide initiatives with our partner authorities through the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership and Suffolk Waste Partnership along with other business or academic organisations

The councils will continue to work with partners across the county and region, including the LEP and public sector leaders, towards the Suffolk-wide ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030. This work will include supporting town and parish councils with their own aspirations to reduce their carbon emissions.

Residents are also being asked to reflect on how they can play their part in reducing Suffolk's carbon footprint, whether it's by reducing their food waste and waste in general, taking part in initiatives such as Refill Suffolk, or getting their recycling right; with a carbon footprint calculator available on the Green Suffolk website.

A subgroup of the task force has also been created to look at how the councils can strengthen biodiversity in the districts – with work now underway following an initial delay, due to the emergency response required by the councils to support communities through the immediate impact of COVID-19.

Play Your Part in Creating a Safer Suffolk

Suffolk residents are being asked to play their part in reducing infection and shopping local as businesses re-open across the county. Councils, partners and businesses have been introducing temporary or trial measures to help people shop and stay safe while keeping to national guidelines. Support to make this happen comes from the 'Safer Places' group, part of the Suffolk Resilience Forum, which includes Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and is made up of Suffolk's NHS, Emergency and Public Services.

The government has announced a phased easing of rules around businesses and other properties opening, starting in June. The Safer Places group is supporting businesses to meet this national guidance, allowing them to trade safely and keep their customers safe. This has meant shops and businesses introducing new social distancing measures as well as some streets being used in different ways to reduce people getting too close.

Residents are being asked to follow the new measures on streets and businesses to keep the risk of spreading COVID-19 and help Suffolk businesses continue trading.

Through the Safer Places work, Suffolk councils and organisations are working hard to support high streets, by devising new ways to help people pass with the little space there is in existing paths and highways.

To help with this parking enforcement will play a role in making sure people keep streets free so traffic can flow or stop people parking on pavements or areas being used by pedestrians. It is expected that more people will be using car parks and motorists are asked to also play their part and acting responsibly and following measures in place.

Councils to Consider CIFCO Business Plan for 2020/21

CIFCO's annual Business Plan is on the agenda for Councillors over the next few weeks, as the property investment company continues to weather the coronavirus

storm and to provide Babergh and Mid Suffolk with vital funding to aid the districts' recovery.

Property investment company CIFCO, which is wholly owned by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, is presenting its third annual business plan to Councillors, detailing its performance over the last year and its investment strategy for the forthcoming year.

While CIFCO has inevitably felt the impact of Covid-19, its company directors are confident that their rigorous risk management and diverse portfolio has put them in good stead to weather the storm. Over the last year, the Councils have benefitted from £1.633m of net income after costs which is the equivalent to 10% of the Councils' annual staff costs or a 13.5% increase in council tax. Whilst over the first quarter of this year revenue have been under pressure CIFCO continues to provide positive cashflow into MSDC.

Over the last 12 months, CIFCO has acquired two additional properties taking the total number in the portfolio up to 14, located largely in the east of England and balanced across commercial sectors to minimise exposure to any one sector, tenant or location. Throughout the year the CIFCO Board considered almost 80 opportunities, rejecting most, and only progressing those that best meet the investment criteria and most benefit the balance and risk profile of the portfolio as a whole.

CIFCO Capital Ltd was established jointly by Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils in 2017 to generate income through property investment which is then ploughed back into council services within the districts to offset reductions in funding from central government. Since its launch, almost £3m has been reinvested into council services.

Councillors are now being asked to consider CIFCO's performance and business plan for 2020/21 which, subject to approval at Full Council meetings in July, will continue to provide a framework and guidance for trading over the next 12 months. Last year the Councils approved the CIFCO fund being increased from £50m to £100m. To date, approximately £60m has been invested by CIFCO. Within this year's business plan, the timescale within which to invest the remaining £40m has been adjusted from April 2021 to October 2021 due to Covid-19 market impact.

Re-opening of Village Halls and Community buildings

The Government has announced that village halls and community buildings are able to open from Saturday 4 July, as part of the easing of lockdown restrictions. The guidance documents, issued by Government on 30 June, provide information on the safe re-opening of village halls and community buildings - including making sure the hall is kept as clean as possible and that social distancing is still adhered to.

Regards

Rick Meyer

Richard.meyer@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Tel: 07771703668