

## **District Councillor's Report – August 2020**

### **Discretionary Business Grants**

The deadline for applications for the Discretionary Grant has been extended to Monday 24<sup>th</sup> August in line with the recent Government announcement that all Covid-19 business grants applications must be received by Friday 28 August when they will close. There is still over approximately £1m of grant funding unallocated and all eligible businesses are urged to apply as soon as possible. The criteria for the second phase of the Discretionary Grant has been expanded and is now open to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses excluded from previous grants, Early Years providers, Ofsted registered childminders, charitable properties in receipt of rate relief as well as small and mobile businesses who have three or more employees and those in shared workspaces.

### **Stick with it Suffolk – Wear a face covering**

Suffolk residents are being asked to keep looking out for each other and combat Covid-19 by wearing a face covering in shops from tomorrow (Friday 24 July).

Businesses, towns and spaces in Suffolk have been getting extra help to make them safer and reduce the risk of Covid-19 spreading as lockdown measures are eased. Support to make this happen comes from the 'Safer Places' group, part of the Suffolk Resilience Forum, which is made up of Suffolk's NHS, Emergency and Public Services including Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils.

This has included supporting businesses to meet this national guidance, allowing them to trade safely and keep their customers safe. Councils and public services have been engaging with local organisations, communities and councillors and organisations to look at tailored solutions for their particular areas to help with issues such as social distancing.

Under the new national changes, measures can be taken if people do not comply with this law on face coverings:

Shops and supermarkets will be expected to encourage compliance with the law and can refuse entry

Transport operators can deny service or direct someone to wear a face covering

In both cases, if necessary, the police have the powers to enforce these measures, including through issuing a fine of £100 (halving to £50 if paid within 14 days).

People are also strongly encouraged to wear a face covering in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing may be difficult and where you come into contact with people you do not normally meet.

Businesses should be aware that there will be some people who will be exempt from wearing face coverings, including children under the age of 11. People with exemptions may have a hidden disability making it difficult for them to wear one and have general difficulties with daily life which others may not readily recognise or identify as a disability.

The advice to businesses, if you are unsure, is to be friendly and affable when asking the person and check:

- do they carry an exemption card such as from KeepSafe
- are they wearing a Hidden Disability Sunflower

Businesses are also asked to not make assumptions if someone is not wearing a face covering, as that person may feel quite vulnerable and uncomfortable - their hidden disability may include issues with communication.

### **Mid Suffolk Leisure Centres' Reopening Date Announced**

Local leisure centres in Mid Suffolk have reopened, after being given the 'green light' by Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and Stradbroke Swim and Fitness Centre in Mid Suffolk which are managed by sports and leisure operator Everyone Active in partnership with Mid Suffolk District Council will reopen their doors on Saturday 25 July.

### **Modification of Planning Conditions Relating to Construction Working Hours**

There have been urgent changes to planning restrictions on construction working hours to support safe construction working, in line with the Government's latest social distancing guidance on construction and other outdoor work. For many construction sites, implementation of this guidance will require changes to working practices, including staggered starts and finishes, requiring different hours of operation to those which are currently permitted for the site through planning conditions. Any extension of permitted working hours must be approved by the Planning authority

## **Babergh and Mid Suffolk Receive Government Funding to Install Solar Carports**

The growth of green initiatives in Babergh and Mid Suffolk has been boosted with the confirmation of an £800,000 grant from the “Getting Building Fund” for the introduction of micro-generation and electricity storage solar carports in Sudbury and Stowmarket. The funding will provide 50% of the budget for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council to install multifunctional solar carports which will generate and store electricity and provide a point for electric vehicle charging. The locations currently being assessed are surface carparks at Station Road, Sudbury and Gainsborough Road, Stowmarket with a flexible third option also under consideration.

## **Wheels In Motion For Babergh and Mid Suffolk’s Healthy Future**

Councillors at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have approved proposals to create a joint Sustainable Travel Action Plan to further encourage sustainable transport, following cross-party support.

Full Councils at both Mid Suffolk District Council (Thursday 23 July) and Babergh District Council (Tuesday 21 July) approved proposals which will see the creation of a Sustainable Travel Action Plan, aiming to increase sustainable travel over coming years.

The hope is to build on the significant number of people that have either returned to or taken up cycling during COVID-19, by encouraging a permanent shift towards sustainable transport such as cycling, walking or public transport throughout the districts.

Reducing pollution and carbon emissions are also reasons for the shift, with the councils wanting to encourage residents to play their part in making Suffolk the greenest county and in supporting the county-wide ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030, all while enjoying the benefits for health and wellbeing.

The final proposal which was adopted by the administrations, followed motions put forward at both Full Council meetings by Green Party councillors Leigh Jamieson and Daniel Pratt which were amended following cross-party collaboration.

## **Councils Advance Vision for Great Communities**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have this week approved a timetable for the Joint Local Plan – further supporting the councils’ ambition to build thriving communities with bright and healthy futures.

Councillors at Mid Suffolk District Council gave the green light for the Local Development Scheme timetable, detailing the next steps for the Joint Local Plan, at its Full Council meeting last night (Thursday), following Babergh District Council unanimously approving the timetable on Tuesday.

The Joint Local Plan will clarify how the councils propose to meet housing and employment targets set by Government and, following input from communities, detail how and where development should take place between now and 2037 – ensuring much needed suitable and sustainable homes are built in the right places. It is proposed that the next iteration of Babergh and Mid Suffolk’s Joint Local Plan will be published in the autumn, after which a six-week consultation will take place, enabling stakeholders to provide further feedback on the soundness of the plan following the public consultation last summer.

At present Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils hold a five year housing land supply and adopted planning policies, which in conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework, provide sufficient criteria for determining planning applications and refusing unsuitable development. This has enabled the councils to refuse a number of planning applications in recent months, such as the refusal of 120 houses at Haughley Park in response to concerns about poor connectivity and harm to local heritage, and 49 new homes in Sroughton being refused due to a lack of proven justifiable need.

Councillors also agreed to the proposed timetable for a review of current Community Infrastructure Levy rates, which are collected from developers when they build new properties, also set out within The Local Development Scheme. The review will ensure sufficient funding is provided to accommodate the additional infrastructure needed to support the development proposed by the Joint Local Plan.

Communities across Babergh and Mid Suffolk have received in excess of £4.5 million in Community Infrastructure Levy since the start of the year – including over £3 million for school expansions – and funding for community led projects ranging from village hall refurbishments to new children’s play areas.

## **CIFCO Continues to Generate Vital Funds To Help Weather The Covid-19 Storm**

Councillors at both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils recently approved plans for property investment company CIFCO to continue to bring in funds to support the districts' recovery – this follows CIFCO meeting payments to Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council in full again this quarter, providing vital funds for services as tradition income is hit by Covid-19. CIFCO has also recently announced the £2.9m purchase of a health centre in Nottingham – bringing in further regular income for the councils.

## **Annual canvass 2020**

Don't lose your voice - residents are urged to look out for their annual canvass letters from Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils. Local residents are being warned not to lose their voice on the decisions that affect them by making sure their electoral registration details are up to date. The annual canvass process, which councils have to carry out by law, ensures that councils can keep the electoral register up to date, and identify any citizens who are not registered so that they can be encouraged to do so. Residents who are not currently registered or whose name does not appear in the letters we send, will need to register to be able to vote, the easiest way is online.

## **Vision For Needham Market Starts To Take Shape**

Mid Suffolk District Council's multi-million-pound investment in Needham Market gets underway this month – with new homes, community facilities and a boost for the local economy set to help the town's post-COVID recovery. Work to deliver a total of over 130 new homes for the town is due to begin this summer, as the council's former headquarters on the High Street is prepared for the first phase of development.

This first phase of 32 homes will be a development named Chambers Green in a nod to the former use of the site. Located on the former Hurstlea Road car park, it will have combination of 2 and 3 bedroom detached and semi-detached homes as well as 1 and 2 bedroom apartments and a retail unit.

Ten of the homes will be 'affordable housing' – helping those on lower income and meeting the need for local housing close to shops and amenities. The listed building that formed part of Mid Suffolk District Council's headquarters will remain part of Chambers Green and will be converted back to residential use, preserving its character and period details.

Adjacent to the site, the former bowling green will be maintained as open space for the local community with a woodland walk and benches being added near to the existing

duck pond. With the closure of the car park on Hurstlea Road, alternative long-term parking provision is now available at Barrett's Lane. The bottle and clothes banks have been relocated to the Station Yard car park. The Chambers Green development is the first project to be delivered by Mid Suffolk Growth, a joint venture between Mid Suffolk District Council and the Norse Group to develop council-owned land and provide housing for our communities.

### **Councils' Blueprint For The Future Gets Green Light**

Cabinets at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have today approved a raft of environmental measures to help the councils achieve their ambition of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The proposals, approved at the two councils' simultaneous cabinet meeting, were developed by a cross-party Environment and Climate Change Task Force, which were welcomed in a joint statement from all political group leaders last month. This decision will now 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.

These are the first steps in achieving the long term objective to reduce the councils' current emissions of approximately 5,452 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) per year, looking into how best to invest in order to reduce this to net zero. The plan follows the climate emergency motions passed by both councils in 2019 and the creation of the Joint Environment and Climate Change Task Force. In forming the proposals, the task force took expert advice on which areas to target first for the greatest impact – working with Groundwork Suffolk to analyse current emissions and develop recommendations. Headline actions 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 as well as with other business and academic organisations

Regards

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