

District Councillor's Report – Sep 2020

Suffolk's Resilience Partners Urge People To Queue Responsibly Outside Bars and Pubs

Those looking to enjoy a drink with their friends are being urged to remember Coronavirus is still a very real threat to everyone's health. Although the restrictions on lockdown have been relaxed over the past two months, Covid-19 still represents a serious risk to the public, no matter what their age.

The Suffolk Resilience Forum – which includes Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, working with Suffolk's NHS, Emergency and other public services – was concerned to see reports of people queuing up outside at least one popular nightspot in Suffolk last weekend with no social distancing or apparent concern for the welfare of themselves or their friends. Now, more than ever, there is no room for complacency through thinking the virus is beaten or individuals are not at risk of contracting it.

Overall Suffolk has been a shining example in complying with the instructions issued since March in an effort to keep everyone in our communities safe and protect the NHS. Young people looking to enjoy themselves on the hot summer evenings are being asked to continue that approach this weekend.

Babergh And Mid Suffolk Receive Government Funding To Install Solar Carports

The growth of sustainable technology across the district – a major part of the council's ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030 - will receive an injection of up to £800,000 in matched funding from the "Getting Building Fund", with the money going towards a pilot scheme to introduce electricity micro-generation and storage solar carports in Sudbury and Stowmarket.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Getting Building Fund, awarded the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership £32.1m to help deliver jobs, skills and infrastructure in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pilot scheme in Babergh and Mid Suffolk is one of 13 successful projects across Suffolk and Norfolk to receive funding.

The successful bid for funding will provide up to 50% of the budget for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council to install multifunctional solar carports which will generate and store electricity for electric vehicle charging. The locations currently being assessed are surface car parks at Station Road, Sudbury and Gainsborough Road, Stowmarket with a flexible third option also to be modelled.

Results of the detailed feasibility study will be completed by November this year with the initial two pilot projects being delivered by March 2022.

This initiative underpins the environmental and economic aspirations of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council to become carbon neutral by 2030 by increasing and showcasing localised energy production and clean/green technologies, supporting reduced fuel miles and offsetting energy costs.

Shopping Local Could Provide Lasting Impact On The High Street

High Streets across Babergh and Mid Suffolk could benefit from almost £19m of additional income over the next 6 months, if all adults spent an extra £5 by shopping local every week. With just under 150,000 adults aged over 18 in Babergh and Mid Suffolk, an extra £5 spent could equate to over £730,000 per week being generated in local high streets and villages across the districts, equating to a whopping £18,980,000 over the next six months. The figure has been announced during Shop Local Week (10-16 August) part of the government's 'Enjoy Summer Safely' campaign, which aims to celebrate the importance of local and independent stores and the benefits they bring to the whole community and local economy. Throughout lockdown, local shops and markets have played a crucial role in supporting the local community to buy food and supplies in a safe and easy way without having to travel too far. Many businesses have diversified their offer to make shopping for essentials simple and supporting those who needed to shield. New services like deliveries, online ordering and even additional market days have provided a lifeline for many local residents.

With many lockdown measures starting to ease, Shop Local Week aims to encourage people to keep visiting to their local high street and not return to pre-Covid habits of out of town and online shopping.

Council Homes For Eye Get Go-Ahead

The long-awaited redevelopment of a former care home in Eye has taken a major step forward with planning permission being granted for 16 'affordable homes' to be built on the site. Paddock House, the site of a former 30-bed care home and day centre in Wellington Road, was purchased by Mid Suffolk District Council in 2016, beginning a long-running series of discussions and consultation with Eye Town Council and the local community over its regeneration. The scheme finally received the go-ahead last week, when planning consent with conditions was granted under the Chief Executive's emergency planning powers, as a result of the coronavirus emergency.

The site will include 16 'affordable homes', in other words, available either to rent by those on lower incomes, adding to Mid Suffolk District Council's housing stock of more than 3,000 council homes, or to buy as shared equity homes – helping

low income house-hunters onto the first rung of the property ladder. The houses have been designed sympathetically, using materials appropriate for the Eye Conservation Area, with plans also including parking, footpaths, car ports, bin and cycle storage, open space and landscaping.

The delivery of the new homes, to be managed by Icen Homes, will also preserve the former private garden and established Indian Bean tree as a new public space for the local community to enjoy.

New Look For Regal Theatre Revealed

Councillors have been able to get their first glimpse of the new look Regal Theatre as the cafe and entrance starts to take shape. Following its refurbishment and extension, the Regal will feature three modern cinema screens offering an improved audio-visual experience and new seating, as well as a new front of house, café and bar area. The improved entrance and car parking will also add to the visitor experience.

It is hoped the new cinema will attract more visitors into Stowmarket to enjoy shopping and attractions as well as the bars and restaurants that the town has to offer.

Despite work starting onsite back in March, this is the first time that councillors from Stowmarket Town Council and Mid Suffolk District Council, who are leading on the development, have been able to see the progress of the new cinema which is due to be completed in early 2021. Work has been progressing onsite through lockdown with the team from Mixbrow Construction adopting safe working practices to meet the Government guidance around COVID-19.

The Regal Theatre is benefitting from £3.6m investment and is part of a wider vision for Stowmarket, with the aim of improving and increasing leisure provision for the community and attracting more visitors into the heart of the town and local area.

Council Committee Gives Go-Ahead for Stowupland Homes

Mid Suffolk District Council has approved outline planning permission for 80 houses in Stowupland, provided that the scheme delivers "affordable homes" for low income house-hunters, a pedestrian crossing at a traffic blackspot in the village, and brings an important local green space into community control.

Gladman Developments Ltd had originally sought permission for 70 properties to be built on the land to the south of Gipping Road, but this was rejected by the council's planning committee in January 2020, as Councillors felt the adverse impact of that scheme outweighed the benefits.

Proposals include 28 'affordable homes', 20 of which will be affordable rental properties, allowing residents to benefit from lower rents than the local market rate. The remaining eight homes will provide opportunity for shared ownership, helping those struggling to get on the housing ladder to buy their own home. Both the affordable and marketable houses will range in size - accommodating first time buyers, families and local residents wishing to downsize.

The development will fund vital local highways infrastructure projects, contributing £50,000 towards junction improvements on the B1115 and A1120. A new controlled crossing on the A1120 will also be funded by the applicant, with the committee requesting an additional condition to guarantee that the developer brings forward the design for a safe crossing promptly, and makes it available for use prior to the first occupation of the new homes. This safety measure, on a road which has been the site of numerous traffic accidents involving pedestrians, will benefit the whole community, including local school children who walk this route on their way to and from Stowupland High School.

Another condition set out by the council, will see Gladman Developments gift nearby Thradstone's Meadow, a large area of currently unprotected amenity land, to Stowupland Parish Council, securing community use of this locally important green space for years to come. A payment of £75,000 will be made by the applicant to fund the maintenance and management of this land for 25 years. There will also be further public open space, including children's play equipment, to the north of the site.

Green light For 300 Homes Enables New Village School

Detailed plans for 300 new homes at Woolpit have received the go ahead – securing "affordable homes" for low income house-hunters, highways improvements and a new primary school for the village.

Proposals incorporate 60 'affordable homes', 45 of which will be affordable rental properties, allowing residents to benefit from lower rents than the local market rate. The remaining 15 homes will provide opportunities for shared ownership, helping those struggling to get on the housing ladder to buy their own home. Both the affordable and market homes will range in size - accommodating first time buyers, families and local residents wishing to downsize.

The development will benefit from large public open spaces, including land to the east of the site to accommodate the future expansion of Woolpit Cricket Club.

Land will also be gifted to increase capacity at the Village Hall car park, allowing for further enjoyment of this popular community space. This is in addition to the allocation of over five acres of land to Suffolk County Council, for use as the site of a new 420-place primary school, together with a 90-place pre-school centre. These new provisions will be partly funded by the developer, with s106 conditions requiring a contribution of over £1million on completion of the new homes.

Another condition set out by the council, will see the applicant fund vital local highways infrastructure projects, including the introduction of a new roundabout on the interchange between the A14 and A1088. In their feedback on proposals Suffolk Highways supported the improvement, stating it would reduce the risk of traffic accidents at this location – benefiting all road users.

Plans also include a commitment to finance local sustainable transport in Woolpit, with the allocation of £15,000 to construct or improve nearby bus stops, as well as a funding towards the creation of improved cycle and pedestrian links between Woolpit and Elmswell, which is on the rail network. To further meet the council's green ambitions, the development will include multiple electric vehicle charging points. Measures will also be imposed to protect local wildlife, with proposals incorporating a Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy, Wildlife Sensitive Lighting Design Scheme, and Skylark Mitigation Strategy.

£2.2m Leisure Upgrades In Stowmarket Get Underway

A new £2.2m upgrade and extension to Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in Stowmarket, including a new gym, poolside features and changing rooms, is now underway. Mid Suffolk District Council, which owns the centre managed by leisure provider Everyone Active, is investing £2.2m in the project as part of their plans to upgrade their leisure provision in the district. The works, carried out by Callix Leisure Ltd and expected to be completed by Winter 2020, although a refresh of the sports hall, café, dance studios, public areas and shower and toilet facilities for swimmers, have already been completed during lockdown.

Business Innovation To Be Celebrated At New Awards Event

Forward thinking businesses, large and small, are being invited to enter the inaugural Innovation Awards 2020, being run by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils. 2020 has been a challenging year for businesses, many of whom have had to adapt and change their way of working to overcome the restrictions caused by COVID-19. The Innovation Awards will celebrate and recognise businesses who have put innovation at the heart of the of what they do, creating

new initiatives, supporting customers and leading best practice across the districts.

The awards are for businesses, based in Babergh and Mid Suffolk, who want to showcase how they are using innovative practices, cutting edge technology, sustainable solutions or delivering outstanding customer service. Entering the awards is free and there are 11 categories in a range of sectors including food, retail and healthcare.

The awards are open to organisations of any size and will recognise businesses, teams and individuals. There is a category for SMEs and an opportunity to find the innovators of the future with an award for those aged 16-25. Originally planned as a black-tie event for June this year, the Innovation Awards are leading by example and adopting a virtual format to adhere to current social distancing measures. Nominees and sponsors will still benefit from exclusive online networking opportunities and celebrate the innovation taking place across the districts.

Approval For Plans To Transform School Into ‘Affordable Homes’ For Stowmarket

Plans by Mid Suffolk District Council to regenerate the former Stowmarket Middle School site into 38 homes to help lower-income house hunters has received the formal go-ahead. The development, approved by Mid Suffolk’s Development Control Committee last September, will offer a mix of affordable housing: to be offered either as shared ownership, or as social or affordable housing, where rent is calculated below the private market rate in order to help households on low to moderate incomes. They are amongst more than 200 homes in Mid Suffolk’s social housing pipeline over the next two years – part of a multi-million pound investment by the Council in social housing across the district.

Regards

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