

District Councillor's Report September 2021

Statement regarding Afghan refugees

On Wednesday 18 August, the Government announced its new resettlement scheme for Afghan refugees. Whilst the full details are yet to be confirmed, it is crystal clear that the Government needs local authorities everywhere to step up and support this national effort.

All councils in Suffolk are committed to this cause. We have already helped a small number of Afghan interpreters and their families to resettle in Suffolk, in addition to ongoing work to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children and other refugees entering the UK. In the coming days and weeks, the district, borough and county councils will continue working with the Government to do what we can to provide assistance to vulnerable refugees.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk join calls for devolution talks with Government

In a joint letter sent to Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Babergh's Cllr John Ward and Mid Suffolk's Cllr Suzie Morley, joined leaders of all of Suffolk's six councils and Police and Crime Commissioner Tim Passmore, seeking early discussion over a possible devolution deal for Suffolk involving devolved decision-making powers and increased public funding for the county.

Green light for Gateway 14

Initial plans, with conditions, were approved this month for Gateway 14 – Stowmarket's 2.45 million square foot, innovation, business and logistics park.

Gateway 14, adjacent to the A14, is set to create thousands of jobs and bring a massive boost to the region's economy, but at the planning meeting councillors also sought to further mitigate its impact on the environment and neighbouring communities.

The cross-party planning committee approved the hybrid application subject to bolstering recommendations by planning officers by adding conditions around landscaping, biodiversity, construction traffic, and a Section 106 agreement – a legal obligation for a developer to contribute to community facilities.

Gateway 14 is a development by Gateway 14 Ltd (wholly owned by Mid Suffolk District Council) and partner Jaynic.

Show homes give first glimpse of council investment in Needham Market

Show homes in Needham Market opened their doors to potential buyers last month – in the first phase of the council’s multi-million investment in the town.

Five houses on the new Chambers Green development – built on the council’s former office complex in the town – are now open for viewing by appointment, with councillors amongst the first over the threshold to see the new homes for themselves.

The development is being delivered by Mid Suffolk Growth – a joint venture between Mid Suffolk District Council and Norse Group set up to deliver housing and promote sustainable growth across the district.

The first phase sees the Council’s former headquarters transformed into a combination of two and three bed detached and semi-detached houses, as well as one and two bed apartments and a retail unit. Ten of these properties will be affordable homes, helping to support those on lower incomes.

Part of the original headquarters building is listed, and its character and period features will be preserved. The former bowling green next to the site will be maintained as open space, with a community walk and benches to be added near the existing duck pond.

The Chambers Green development is, part of a wider vision for Needham Market – which will ultimately see a total of 133 new houses, flats and bungalows in the town, a natural community space and walk, a new library, a café and visitor centre at nearby Needham Lake, and improved access between the lake and town to boost visitor numbers to the high street.

The first phase of 32 homes at Chambers Green is due to be completed by Spring 2022. The second phase will provide an additional 60 homes, and the transformation of the former Middle School will create a further 41 homes.

The Middle School development also includes converting the existing Victorian school building into a library to replace the town’s current library provision.

At the same time, the council’s investment in the new visitor centre is expected to attract more visitors to enjoy the open space at Needham Lake. A new pedestrian access through Needham Market train station will then provide easy access from Needham Lake to the town centre where visitors can enjoy the High Street’s independent shops and restaurants.

Green oasis set to strengthen Mid Suffolk's biodiversity

Almost three acres of land near Stowmarket has been bought by Mid Suffolk District Council to provide a green oasis for the town – as part of the council's biodiversity plans. The council has invested £65k, funded from their climate change and biodiversity reserve, to acquire 2.71 acres at Wash Lane, in Great Finborough near Stowmarket. The investment is a further step in the council's joint Biodiversity Action Plan – protecting and strengthening the district's wildlife and plant life populations.

As verdant wetland alongside the River Rat, with extensive tree cover including several with Tree Preservation Orders, it is already a welcome home to several wildlife species. Visitors include deer, willow warbler and siskin birds, the common toad and a wide variety of insects. Suffolk Wildlife Trust will also be carrying out a full habitat survey and assessment on site.

The land is situated off a popular route for local walks and rambles in the outskirts of the town, which joins Combs Lane and the main Finborough Road, crossing the River Rat. As it is not suitable for development, it is an ideal space for local nature to quietly thrive alongside a busy town. As such, there are currently no plans to make the site publicly accessible, but instead allow it to be a green oasis for local flora and fauna.

Work begins on Woolpit community car park

Mid Suffolk councillors were joined by NHS representatives today to mark the start of construction on a much-needed car park serving Woolpit Health Centre and the local community.

The project has been made possible following the transfer of land earlier this year to Mid Suffolk District Council from David Wilson Homes, who are currently building new homes in the village.

Since permission was granted for this development, the council has worked closely with Suffolk County Council, Woolpit Health Centre, the NHS West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group and Woolpit Parish Council to ensure that the transferred land best meets the needs of the community for years to come.

It will initially be used as an additional car park for Woolpit Health Centre, enabling the surgery to meet demand from housing growth in the area and continue to serve patients from almost 30 surrounding towns and villages. The 120 new parking spaces created by the land will also be invaluable in the ongoing Covid-19 and flu vaccination effort, accommodating potential extra demand if booster jabs are required in the winter and beyond.

Further community uses for the car park are currently being explored with Woolpit Parish Council, who have lent their support to proposals and joined today's ground breaking ceremony.

Regards

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