

District Councillor's Annual Report October 2021

Success for Babergh and Mid Suffolk at national awards

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils received national recognition this month for their innovative support of communities through Covid and beyond – winning bronze in the overall Council of the Year category of the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards 2021, silver for service improvements by our Planning Enforcement team and gold for our Virtual High Street initiative supporting local retailers. The councils' Housing Solution team was also highly commended in the 'Community Heroes' category of the Municipal Journal (MJ) Awards.

Councils prioritise residents' wellbeing

Babergh and Mid Suffolk councillors have given the go-ahead to a new Wellbeing Strategy – building upon the councils' continued commitment to helping its residents live happy, healthy and independent lives.

It aims to ensure that everyone in Babergh and Mid Suffolk has the best possible conditions for good wellbeing, and consideration has been given to the approach required by the councils and its partners to achieve this, as well as the strategic objectives required to get the right results.

There are also three long term outcomes included in the strategy, which maps out the councils' wellbeing ambitions until 2027:

- Families lead active, healthy, safe and independent lives and manage their own health & wellbeing
- Sustainable and inclusive places, and spaces, which maximise health & wellbeing opportunities and benefits
- Health inequalities will be reduced

The Wellbeing Strategy will complement the recently refreshed [Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy](#) and recruitment of a new Communities and Wellbeing Assistant Director – a shared post with the Clinical Commissioning Groups – ensuring Babergh and Mid Suffolk remain great communities with bright and healthy futures that everyone is proud to call home.

Ultra-low emission HVO fleet takes to the road

Babergh and Mid Suffolk are the first rural UK councils to switch their fleet to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) – slashing carbon emissions by up to 90% and supporting the councils' carbon neutral aims.

This week, the councils' waste fleet begun its transfer over to HVO. Its 35 waste lorries are the first to transfer and will be followed by its smaller public realm / housing services vehicles.

By ditching diesel, they will see a significant reduction in pollutant emissions from their fleet, with up to a 90% reduction in CO₂. It will also support a circular economy, as the certified sustainable HVO fuel is solely produced from waste cooking oil.

The move was approved by the councils' cabinets in January this year and forms a major step in their Carbon Reduction Management Plan, which sets out how net zero carbon emissions aim to be achieved by 2030. Before HVO, the fleet represented just over a quarter (26%) of the councils' total CO₂ emissions, approximately 880 tonnes per year – which will now reduce immediately.

Joint Local Plan Public Examination Resumes

Joint Local Plan public examination resumes The Hearing Sessions for the public examination of our Joint Local Plan have resumed. Sessions are being held virtually, enabling them to be fully inclusive, whilst also ensuring public safety, and are being live streamed in real time on the councils' Joint Local Plan YouTube channel, should you wish to follow the plan's progress.

Councils empower communities to plan for the future

Proposals to streamline the Neighbourhood Plan process have been approved by Babergh and Mid Suffolk councillors – supporting the councils' ongoing ambition for residents to help shape development in the districts.

Neighbourhood Plans provide communities with the opportunity to develop a shared vision for their area – ensuring that everyone can have their say on where future growth, to meet Government housing targets, takes place. The plans can also include guidance on what new homes should look like, which open spaces the community would like to preserve and where they'd like new shops or businesses to be located.

There are many benefits to preparing a plan – once adopted, the parish is then eligible for an uplift in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds, bringing the total to 25% when new homes are built in their area. Unlike a parish plan or village design statement, an adopted Neighbourhood Plan also holds statutory weight and status in the planning decision process and becomes part of the district's wider Development Plan.

To date, around 50 parishes in Babergh and Mid Suffolk have started to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan, with 16 of these being successfully adopted so far. However, both councils felt that the process could be streamlined – encouraging more communities to prepare a plan and helping those currently underway.

A recommendation was therefore made for Neighbourhood Plans to automatically proceed to referendum after examination – subject to the implementation of any required modifications agreed by the parish and district councils – rather than having to seek approval at Cabinet.

It was also suggested that post-referendum Neighbourhood Plans – with a majority yes vote – could be formally adopted by the councils' Chief Executive, again reducing the need for this decision to wait until a formal council meeting took place.

This will help mitigate potential delays to plans progressing due to external factors, such as Covid-19 and pre-election periods – supporting the councils' continued commitment to Neighbourhood Plans being adopted in a timely manner to enable communities to start reaping the rewards of having a plan in place.

Chance to have your say on the future of parking

Now's your chance to have a say on Babergh and Mid Suffolk's future parking strategy - with residents, businesses and visitors across the districts urged to help shape plans for the next decade.

The councils are working with key stakeholders, including Suffolk County Council as the highways authority, town and parish councils, business groups, as well as local organisations to find the best future solution for everyone. They are also keen to hear the views of individuals via an [online questionnaire on the councils' website](#), running until 28 September. Anyone wishing to take part who does not have internet access should call 02392 432756 to request a paper copy.

Virtual High Street expands to Eye and Needham Market

The Virtual High Street has welcomed another 40 businesses onto the platform as it expands to Eye and Needham Market.

With over 300 businesses already on the site covering Sudbury, Stowmarket and Hadleigh, the Virtual High Street provides an online window onto the shops and businesses in the district, connecting businesses with their customers. . Customers can visit their favourite local shops online to browse stock, place orders and arrange click and collect or a delivery from home or on the move.

As part of the Councils wider vision for its key towns, the Virtual High Street is helping town centre businesses to be more resilient, add to their high street presence and provide a crucial role to boost the local economy.

Regards

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