

District Councillor's Report November 2021

Work to Continue on Blueprint for Districts' Future Development

Public examination of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council's Joint Local Plan – the strategic blueprint for future development of the districts - has been paused by the Planning Inspector to allow the councils further time to review its evidence. The plan – which outlines housing requirements and considers the long-term impact of climate change, including flooding risk, water supply and biodiversity – is now in the final stage of the process. This involves submitting to the Secretary of State, who appoints a Planning Inspector to carry out an independent examination before recommending whether or not it can be adopted. The total process is lengthy and takes on average seven years, with the examination element usually taking around 18 months – often with requests for further work or clarification. Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council's Plan is progressing faster than average, with work having started in 2016 and the Plan being submitted for examination in March this year.

£1.5m Funding Boost for Babergh and Mid Suffolk Communities

Town and Parish Councils across Babergh and Mid Suffolk will receive £1.5 million in neighbourhood CIL this month – paving the way for a range of vital community facilities and projects.

Developers are charged Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) when building new homes in the districts – enabling local infrastructure to keep pace with housing growth, as well as supporting the councils' vision for its communities to be attractive, successful and connected places for people to live and work. A proportion of this funding is automatically paid to town and parish councils, who are eligible for up to 15% of collected funds from their area, subject to a financial cap, with the potential for this to increase to 25% if they have successfully adopted a Neighbourhood Plan. They can then decide how to spend this money to support the development of their local area – ensuring that the funding best meets the needs of the community. The latest payments, set to be made shortly, will see £1,542,380 distributed to 79 town and parish councils across Babergh and Mid Suffolk. Of this £1,119,655 will be allocated to 47 town and parish councils in Mid Suffolk, whilst 32 of Babergh's town and parish councils will receive a share of £422,725.

Green light for further funding to support Mid Suffolk communities

Housing growth continues to help provide vital infrastructure across Mid Suffolk, with £118,000 allocated this week for community centre improvements and sports facilities in Debenham, Elmswell, Rickinghall and Framsdén.

Tree for Life scheme welcomes applications from new parents

A Tree for Life scheme in Babergh and Mid Suffolk which offers a free tree for new parents, is open for 2021 applications. The scheme is open to all families in the districts who have or are welcoming a new arrival between 1 January and 31 December 2021. Parents who may have lost a child during the same period are also able to apply for a remembrance tree. The initiative offers parents with a new born or newly adopted child the chance to mark their arrival by planting a tree. It aims to benefit families, communities and the environment by boosting tree coverage across the district.

So far the councils have given out over a thousand trees through Tree for Life, with 2020 applicants collecting their trees last month following a necessary delay to allow the council to prioritise essential services during the pandemic. Expert help is always on hand on collection to advise families on their tree choice and aftercare at home.

Over 100 families have already applied to the 2021 scheme, but the councils are encouraging even more people to [apply for their tree on the councils' website](#) before the 10 January 2022 deadline.

Councils Light the Road to a Greener Future

Two Suffolk councils have committed to reducing streetlight intensity across their districts – protecting plant and wildlife, and reducing energy use, in line with biodiversity and climate change ambitions.

Following cross-party support for motions at recent Full Council meetings, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have both committed to reducing artificial lighting across their public realm and housing assets. Including additional lighting control guidance within their Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), currently in development, was also approved.

This means any new or replacement artificial lighting in the district - whether in the form of street lighting, commercial and residential lighting, or advertising signage – will be expected to meet the lowest possible level of intensity and visual intrusion. Streetlighting currently in use will also be looked at.

The move provides an opportunity for the councils to reduce their energy use, as well as the negative impacts on human health and wellbeing, and wildlife, caused by intense blue white light. A particular focus has been placed on protecting and enhancing dark skies for bats, owls and other nocturnal insect populations which are declining.

As Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are only responsible for a number of streetlights within their districts, they will be working with partners such as Suffolk County Council, suppliers, as well as community safety and wildlife groups, to help reduce wider light pollution.

It complements the councils' climate change ambitions and Biodiversity Action Plan measures, to reduce carbon emissions, and strengthen and protect plant and wildlife. Some of these include, [mapping existing and potential wildlife corridors and tree coverage](#), as well as wildflower, hedgerow and tree planting, among others.

New iPad Lending Scheme to Help Residents get Online

Suffolk Libraries and Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are joining forces to help residents get online with a new iPad lending scheme – supporting those who need a little extra help to access services in an increasingly digital world.

26 new iPads, all with 4G internet connectivity and a range of pre-installed applications and web links, will be available for free to anyone in the two districts to borrow. They will be based at Stowmarket, Hadleigh, Sudbury and Needham Market libraries.

The pilot, which will last for a year, has been made possible thanks to funding from the NHS Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, with additional support from the councils. It aims to help reduce the level of digital isolation in the districts and enable residents to access and navigate the internet when they need. Devices will be available from participating libraries from 19 October.

Anyone wishing to borrow one simply needs to have a Suffolk Libraries account and sign up to the user agreement. The iPads can be borrowed for up to three weeks, and as they already have inbuilt mobile internet, residents can get online even if they don't have an internet connection at home.

Regards

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