

## **District Councillor's Report January 2022**

### **Blueprint for districts' future development to progress**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have welcomed a decision by Planning Inspectors to allow work on their Joint Local Plan to continue – meaning the councils can ensure the right developments happen in the right places at the right time.

Public examination of the Local Plan, the strategic outline for future development of the districts, was paused earlier this year to allow the councils further time to review their evidence.

An exploratory meeting was held with the councils and inspectors on Thursday (December 16) during which a proposed work programme was agreed that would see the councils have an adopted plan next year, helping to shape the future for Babergh and Mid Suffolk's communities.

Work on the Joint Local Plan began in 2016 when the councils began gathering a range of evidence to help inform its preparation, including studies on retail, economic land needs, housing land availability and housing market assessments. The plan was then further developed following consultation, with submissions of more than 14,000 comments from over 1,300 people and input from both statutory consultees and cross-party councillors.

The plan – which outlines housing requirements and considers the long-term impact of climate change, including flood risk, water supply and biodiversity, as well as other matters such as supporting the economy and our town centres – is now nearing the final stages of the process. This involves a review by Planning Inspectors, who are appointed by the Secretary of State, to carry out an independent examination before recommending whether or not it can be adopted.

The Inspectors' proposals, agreed on Thursday, will see the councils now proceed with their Joint Local Plan in two parts. Important social, economic and environmental objectives will be put in place first, while remaining work on spatial strategy matters and housing allocations are addressed in part two. This means the councils will have an up-to-date plan for decision making.

The Inspectors gave assurances in the meantime that they recognised around 90% of the housing requirement that Babergh and Mid Suffolk needs to provide is already earmarked through existing commitments and Neighbourhood Plan allocations – meaning the councils can demonstrate they are meeting housing needs while the second part of the Joint Local Plan is developed.

## **Work begins on carbon-cutting solar carport schemes**

Works have begun on installing solar carports which will help power and slash the carbon emissions of two council-owned leisure centres - as part of council plans to tackle climate change.

Phased works to install 70 solar carports at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in Stowmarket have now begun, with further works to install an additional 40 carports at Kingfisher Leisure Centre in Sudbury due to fully start in January next year. The schemes form part of a £2.8m investment in solar at the councils leisure centres; with £1.4m in funding for the solar carports pilot, and a further £1.4m in funding to install solar panels and other energy saving measures on the leisure centre buildings.

The carport technology, to be installed by East Anglia-based Polysolar, will provide energy to help run the centres. As well as battery storage and several electric vehicle charging points, which will be available in both regular and accessible bays, including two rapid chargers at each site. The initiative forms part of the councils' Carbon Reduction Management Plan, and is being funded by over £600k from the councils on top of £800k of Government matched funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' Getting Building Fund. Awarded by the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, the match funding is to help deliver jobs, skills, and infrastructure in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Among the first rural UK councils trialling the technology, the councils' hope is that by championing innovation, their example will encourage others to follow suit. The carports are expected to be completed by Spring 2022.

## **Freeport East passes major milestone**

Mid Suffolk District Council has welcomed news that Gateway 14, near Stowmarket, has officially been designated as a tax site as part of Freeport East.

Freeport East has moved a significant step closer to fulfilling its vision. The outline business case has been formally approved by Government, the three tax sites in Felixstowe, Harwich as well as Gateway 14 have been agreed, and Statutory Instruments laid to enshrine them in legislation.

George Kieffer, Acting Chairman of Freeport East, said: "This is a major achievement. Freeport East represents a unique opportunity to deliver economic growth and will create many high skilled jobs in the local communities. It will work closely together with the private sector as well as education institutions to create these opportunities through innovation and investment. Following designation businesses investing in the Freeport's tax sites will be able to benefit from a number of tax reliefs.

"The UK Freeports policy is designed to encourage businesses from around the world to create new hubs of global trade that will transform economic

prospects and job opportunities for local communities. The location of Freeport East, with the country's main unitised trade hub at its core and 50% of planned offshore wind capacity on its doorstep, could not be better placed to deliver on these objectives and to help the UK achieves its ambitious energy transition objectives.”

### **Scheme to support new small businesses marks successful six months**

A pilot scheme to support small businesses in Babergh and Mid Suffolk has been hailed a success as it reaches its six-month milestone. Since its launch in July 2021, the Innovate Local initiative has supported 11 small businesses by providing a free pitch at either Stowmarket or Hadleigh markets for up to four weeks. In addition to a regular spot on the market, business owners were offered support to run a safe and successful stall, mentoring, business advice and training opportunities both before and after the pilot to help them maximise the opportunity.

Feedback from the traders who have taken part in the scheme has been overwhelming positive with several investing in their own equipment to use on the market or other events. Following the initial success of the pilot, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are investigating ways to expand the Innovate Local scheme during 2022.

### **Councils urge National Highways to ‘unblock Copdock’**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have submitted a joint response to a consultation by National Highways on proposed improvements to the Copdock Interchange – urging the creation of a new link road to keep business traffic flowing freely.

The A14 junction 55 is a vital interchange for the region, linking the Port of Felixstowe with the Midlands and beyond via the M6 and M1, and Colchester, Chelmsford, London, the M25 and Stansted Airport to the south. As part of an informal pre-application consultation on potential improvements to the junction, National Highways sought feedback on two possible options: either improving traffic flow by widening the existing carriageway and introducing left turn lanes, or slashing the volume of traffic using the junction by building a new link road for traffic travelling between the A12 (South) and A14 (East).

In their joint response, the councils back the new link road as the best way of tackling existing congestion and ensuring the efficient movement of goods from Freeport East, including Stowmarket's Gateway 14 - helping to ensure national, regional, and local economic prosperity and delivering the greatest benefits to the districts' communities and businesses.

However, of equal consideration to the councils is the environmental impact, with National Highways urged to ensure any proposals adequately address noise, light

and air quality impacts on local residents, and align with Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' Biodiversity Action Plan – protecting and strengthening plant life and local wildlife in the districts.

### **Eight new affordable homes in Needham Market**

Eight new homes in Needham Market can now open their doors to families as the Chambers Green development continues to expand. The new houses on the Chambers Green development were handed over on the 3 December 21, on the site of the council's former offices are part of Mid Suffolk District Council's multi-million investment in the town.

The former Mid Suffolk headquarters site will be transformed into a combination of two and three bed detached and semi-detached houses, as well as one and two bed apartments. This latest stage will take the tally of completed homes on the estate to 10 - with an additional 19 homes due to be completed by Spring 2022.

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 development is part of Mid Suffolk District Council's Invest in Needham Market programme which aims to deliver projects to support the town and create places with bright and healthy futures that everyone is proud to call home.

In addition to the new houses at Chambers Green, the Invest in Needham Market programme includes the development of new homes at the former Middle School sites, the delivery of a new library for the town and the creation of a new café and visitor centre at Needham Lake.

Warmest regards

*Rick*

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