

## **MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT TO CREETING ST MARY PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING 26<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2022**

This report is a review of the major items of Mid Suffolk District Council business during the past year and is on behalf of District Cllr. Steve Phillips and myself.

### **Council Tax.**

Mid Suffolk District Council has frozen its element of the Council Tax this year but investment in recovery from the Covid 19 pandemic is to continue, aiming to help residents through post-pandemic recovery while still investing in priority areas to improve the quality of life.

### **An update on Covid-19 in Suffolk.**

Thank you to everyone who has helped to support the Covid-19 response, which has seen the Government revert to Plan B and the NHS ramping up the vaccination rollout to combat the spread of the latest variant. Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils continue to provide regular bulletins giving a snapshot of the current Covid-19 situation in Suffolk, along with case numbers and updates. You can find the bulletins via the Suffolk County Council website.

### **Economic Recovery Plan launched.**

Following two years of unprecedented challenges Mid Suffolk and Babergh have launched their economic recovery plan outlining the different initiatives, schemes and packages to help businesses. The aim of the recovery plan is to provide a direction for the councils to support businesses and communities post Covid to stimulate innovation, attract inward investment and encourage strong economic growth. Further details are available from the councils' websites.

### **Neighbourhood planning.**

Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils were named earlier this year as part of a pilot scheme to allow residents an easier way to shape and influence development in their area. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced that Mid Suffolk and Babergh are among 11 areas nationwide to be chosen as part of a pilot scheme to boost participation in neighbourhood planning. The councils have received an element of Government funding to go towards the cost of employing an additional officer, designed to encourage more parish councils to become involved with neighbourhood planning.

### **Gateway 14 update.**

Construction has now commenced at Gateway 14, the 156 acre site which is owned by Mid Suffolk District Council at Mill Lane, Stowmarket on land opposite Tesco off the A1120, adjacent to Junction 50 on the A14, following a ground-breaking ceremony on 25<sup>th</sup> April. The site will aim to offer business, innovation and logistics development facilities and has been appointed Freeport East status. Freeports are intended to stimulate economic activity - goods imported from abroad are exempt from tariffs that are normally paid to the UK government on arrival. It also means that manufacturers in Freeports can import raw materials tariff-free, only paying tariffs on finished products leaving the site for elsewhere in the UK, or the goods can be re-exported overseas without the UK duties being paid. In England, it has been confirmed that companies inside the sites will also be able to claim lower property taxes, including on new buildings that they buy, and companies based in Freeports will also benefit from lower rates of national insurance if they take on new staff. The main infrastructure works to create the framework for this new business park are scheduled to be completed by winter 2022/23.

Detailed negotiations are underway with a number of local and national occupiers to deliver a range of buildings which will deliver a range of employment opportunities.

### **£1.6m boost for Mid Suffolk and Babergh neighbourhoods.**

Town and Parish Councils across Mid Suffolk and Babergh have received almost £1.6 million in the latest round of neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments – paving the way for

a range of vital community facilities and projects. Developers are charged CIL when building new homes in the districts – enabling local infrastructure to keep pace with housing growth.

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, which is the case in Needham Market. 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, made during April, saw almost £1.6 million distributed to 84 town and parish councils across Mid Suffolk and Babergh. Of this just under £1.026 million was allocated to 49 town and parish councils in Mid Suffolk.

### **Ukraine Refugee Scheme.**

Mid Suffolk and Babergh are members of the Suffolk Ukraine Task Group which aims to ensure that refugees' arrival into Suffolk goes as smoothly as possible in respect of the refugees' health and wellbeing needs, assistance with school admissions, and support to help with integration and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages). The Task Group also contacts any matched sponsors to arrange property inspections to ensure the homes are appropriate and safe, and DBS checks (basic Disclosure and Barring Service checks to check for any criminal record) are completed with the help of Community Action Suffolk.

### **A new Digital Skills Programme for businesses.**

Business owners in Mid Suffolk and Babergh who want to learn new methods or improve their existing digital skills can now access free courses as part of a new business support programme. More details on the councils' websites.

**Additional funding to support districts' rough sleepers.** Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Council were awarded £324K to provide specialised emergency accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness. The funding, from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme, will see new energy efficient homes in Stowmarket and Sudbury, to provide emergency accommodation for vulnerable adults at risk of living on the streets.

### **Councils urge National Highways to 'unblock the Copdock Interchange' on the A14.**

Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils 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 from the A14 to the A12 to keep business traffic flowing freely. Traffic flow counts at the interchange have identified this as potentially the most effective solution.

### **Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils respond to new 'County Deal'.**

Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils welcomed news that Suffolk is one of nine counties invited to negotiate a ground-breaking devolution deal – bringing more control over areas such as transport, infrastructure and skills to the local region. Further details are to follow.

### **Mid Suffolk and Babergh Joint Local Plan.**

The Joint Local Plan Examination hearing sessions are paused while officers undertake further work to review parts of the evidence base. It is important that the time is taken to ensure this information is robust. For context, the total process for developing a Local Plan is lengthy. According to the Government's Planning for the Future White Paper, development of a Local Plan takes on average seven years, with the examination element usually taking around 18 - 24 months – often with requests for further work or clarification. The Planning Inspectorate have published performance data that shows the average time for examination is currently 18 months. They also say that plans in rural areas tend to take longer, and that joint Local Plans tend to take longer still. So in essence, the examination has paused but this is a normal part of the process.

### **Development Control (Planning).**

Development Control (Planning) has again been an interesting experience over the past year with several quite contentious planning applications to consider, mainly driven by Central Government's requirement for increased housing allocations. The Coronavirus has also had an impact on the way in which Development Control Committee meetings took place and meetings have mainly been held online via Microsoft Teams, although we have recently reverted to face-to-face meetings with normal Covid-19 restrictions in place.

**Needham Lake Visitor Centre.**

The Covid-19 situation inevitably had a considerable impact on the delivery of this project, which was originally planned to be operating during the latter part of last years summer season. However, I am now pleased to confirm that the Visitor Centre and café was formally opened on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> May, in time for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations at the beginning of June.

The Visitor Centre is called 'The Duck and Teapot' following a local poll of suggested names.

**Locality Awards.**

District Cllr. Steve Phillips and I were pleased to be able to financially support a number of local organisations from our MSDC 2021/22 Locality Awards fund, including 1<sup>st</sup> Needham Market Scout Group, Needham Phoenix Football Club, Needham Market Bowls Club, the River Gipping Trust, Christchurch Packed Lunch Project, Needham Market Community Chinwag, Gipping Women's Club, Gipping Angling Preservation Society, 1<sup>st</sup> Needham Market Rangers, and the Skate Park Committee. The 2022/23 Locality Awards scheme has now opened and application forms can be obtained from either myself or District Cllr. Steve Phillips.

Mike Norris

Mid Suffolk District Councillor

Joint Ward Member, Needham Market Ward