

Brett Vale Annual Parish Meetings 2020

Babergh District Councillor's Report

Support to help rough sleepers maintain tenancies

Greater support will be available in Suffolk to help rough sleepers find and retain private sector housing following a successful bid for Government funds.

At the moment housing authorities often find that private sector landlords are unwilling to house somebody who has been homeless and sleeping rough as that person may have addiction, mental health or other complex needs and require support.

That in turn leaves councils and rough sleepers dependent on hostel and other emergency or temporary accommodation beds which isn't always ideal.

Now Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, and West Suffolk Council are to create a Supported Lettings Team that will enable it to offer greater assurances and confidence to landlords to house these tenants.

The team is being established following a joint bid for £209,000 from the councils to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as part of the Government's plans to end rough sleeping by 2027.

The support team will step in to help people at the early stages of rough sleeping before they become entrenched in the lifestyle and their support needs become much more complex.

The help it will provide will include support:

- to develop independent living skills;
- with learning and skills to manage a tenancy and adhere to tenancy terms;
- with learning to budget;
- to access or signposting to health and care services;
- with budget management, benefits, work or education;
- to develop and cultivate support networks.

Kingfisher Leisure Centre, Sudbury

The ground has officially been broken and work is underway on the new £2.35m extension and upgraded facilities at the Kingfisher Leisure Centre, Sudbury.

As part of this investment by Babergh, with £100,000 of the funds provided through the Community Infrastructure Levy monies, the leisure centre will be extended and refurbished to include:

- A ground floor studio/community room and first floor dance studio
- Refurbished and extended 100-station first floor gym
- New ground floor changing facilities
- Fully refurbished poolside wet changing and toilet facilities

- Improved lighting and décor
- New air handling systems and modern mechanical plant

The improvements will provide the community of Sudbury with some much-needed additional and modernised leisure facilities. This work is a key part of our investing in and improving leisure facilities in the two districts, to achieve the aims set out in our Leisure, Sport & Physical Activity Strategy.

The Leisure Centre will remain open during the work, which is expected to last for approximately one year, with a phased approach designed to cause minimum disruption to members:

- Estimated dates phase 1: May 2019-March 2020 – Construction of new community room and fitness studio
- Estimated dates phase 2: December 2019-February 2020 – Construction of first floor gym
- Estimated dates phase 3: November 2019-March 2020 – Completion of new changing rooms

The first phase was completed in February, with community groups offered the chance to apply for free use of the space.

New Pool in Hadleigh

Work is underway, with the formal ground-breaking held on 26th September, on the new swimming pool at Hadleigh Pool and Leisure. Babergh District Council is investing £2.4M, with £200,000 of funds provided by Hadleigh Town Council and a Sports England grant (£150k), to build the pool. This is expected to be completed in Summer 2020.

All existing facilities including the current pool have so far remained open and unaffected during most of the works; however, to enable final preparations ahead of its demolition later this year, the current pool will close on Friday 20 March.

Sudbury's New Skatepark

Sudbury's new skatepark and multi-use games area were officially opened in Belle Vue Park on 22nd June following £150,000 of investment from Babergh District Council. The work and design followed a long period of planning and community engagement, which saw community groups, skate and BMX park users and the town council work with Babergh District Council to identify the right facilities for Belle Vue Park.

Free Swims

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, in partnership with Abbeycroft Leisure and Everyone Active, are encouraging younger residents to get active by offering free swims at their leisure centres. This is available for all children aged 17 and under across the districts. It was started last Summer and there was an outstanding take-up so we have extended it to all school holidays.

New Bin Collection Routes

Thank you to everyone for their patience while we transitioned to our new collection rounds. This was a huge undertaking for our waste team, as well as an essential step to make the routes more fuel efficient, ensure we have the capacity to meet future home growth and to reduce our environmental impact in line with our climate change ambitions.

Sudbury Silk Festival

The first Sudbury Silk Festival was held on Saturday 7 September, attracting crowds and gaining both national and local media attention. Included in the Festival was the launch of Babergh's own Sudbury Silk Stories archive, a collection of interviews both on camera and microphone detailing the history of the Sudbury silk industry and what it is like to work in the town's world-leading silk mills. The archive is online along with a short film showcasing the history and stories uncovered. It can be found on the Sudbury Silk Stories website.

Joint Local Plan Consultation

Thank you to all our Town and Parish Councils, and to all residents, who took part in our Joint Local Plan consultation last year. The draft Joint Local Plan proposes a set of planning policies that will be used to inform decisions on planning applications and appeals over the next 18 years, up to 2036. Our Strategic Planning Team will now be going through all of the comments received and considering how to amend the draft plan accordingly. We will keep you up to date with next steps going forward, and you can find all the information on our Joint Local Plan website.

Tours of Suffolk's Energy from Waste Facility

Did you know Suffolk's general waste helps to power the equivalent of 30,000 homes? You can encourage residents in your ward to head to a Suffolk Energy from Waste Facility tour to find out how. All they need to do is book a space via their website.

Recycling Information

Last year the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) in Gt Blakenham underwent a major renovation.

With recycling high on the agenda, and in line with our 2030 carbon reduction and greenest county ambitions, we have many online resources available to our parishes and residents 24/7 when navigating the dos and don'ts of recycling. The Suffolk Recycling website has all this information.

Suffolk's Recycling Centres offer free 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle- not a Waste of time!' sessions to interested parties to learn more about ways to reduce waste and improve recycling. Neighbours, parishes or community groups are invited to set up a session, offering an ideal additional or alternative way to access information about recycling.

Tackling Council Tax Fraud

Penalties are to be introduced in Babergh and Mid Suffolk to tackle council tax fraud, alongside new protocol to help those in genuine need.

Cabinets of both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have agreed to impose council tax penalties and to adopt the Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol.

The new penalties policy will be in place by April 2020 and will give the councils the option to issue an initial penalty of £70 to anyone refusing to meet requests to supply legally required information, or failing to let the council know about changes in their circumstances which would affect their entitlement to a discount, exemption or Council Tax reduction. The move could bring in as much as £18,000 a year in fines to the councils' coffers – although the move is intended as a deterrent against fraud and error, rather than a source of income.

Alongside the penalties, the councils have adopted a new protocol produced by Citizens Advice and Local Government Association for the collection of council tax arrears. Citizens Advice report that growing numbers of people are turning to them for help, with council tax debt nationally on the rise over the last three years.

The Shared Revenues Partnership (SRP), which collects council tax on behalf of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils as well as Ipswich Borough Council, has already been working with Citizens Advice to ensure the processes it has in place to deal with arrears are fair and ethical.

Paperless Billing

Through an online account, residents can opt for paperless billing, check their balance, see instalments, update their details and see council tax reduction and housing benefit claim information as well as viewing bills online.

What Next in Sudbury? Exhibition

Babergh District Council opened the doors to hundreds of visitors at special public exhibition in January – to share proposals for the town with Sudbury residents.

The public exhibition – What next for Sudbury? – showcased developments already taking place across the town, including investment in Kingfisher Leisure Centre, Gainsborough's House and St Peter's regeneration, as well as sharing proposals for Belle Vue.

It also shared findings of the recent study commissioned by Suffolk County Council into ways to revitalise Sudbury including the planned relocation of the Hamilton Road bus station to an on-street facility and the redesign of Market Hill in order to attract more visitors into the town centre.

The event also gave residents their first glimpse at plans for the proposed hotel and restaurant on the site of the former swimming pool at Belle Vue ahead of any planning application being submitted, as well as more information on proposals for the future use of Belle Vue House and investment in facilities for Belle Vue Park.

New Housing Assistance policy to help those in need

In January Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils approved a new Housing Assistance Policy to help residents suffering with a long-term illness adapt their homes.

The introduction of the Minor Adaptations Grant offers financial support to enable residents to carry out minor adaptations to their home up to the value of £7,500. Works covered within the new scheme include ramps, bathing/washing facilities, additional heating, stairlifts, key safes and wash/dry toilets.

Babergh 2020/21 Budget

At the February council meeting, councillors approved Babergh's budget for 2020/21, including an increase in council tax that will see £5 (3.1%) a year added to the bill of a Band D property. There will also be a small increase of 2.7% in council house rents, after several years of annual 1% reductions.

The council tax discount period for unoccupied and unfurnished properties will be reduced from 3 months to 28 days but the level of discount will stay at 25%. Full council tax would be payable after

the 28-day discount has expired. The uninhabitable discount will remain unchanged at 25% discount for 12 months.

Our investments continue to be an increasing and necessary part of our income to replace lost government support. We have a balanced budget this year, with some spare funds to top up our reserves, but the medium term outlook still presents a challenge and we await a long-term funding settlement from the government.

However, there is a huge caveat now in that, along with all local authorities, this budget is now undeliverable as a result of the Coronavirus crisis. The Local Government Association is talking to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government about options to support councils and help them to recover.

Parking

Parking is an emotive issue – whether we're talking about unlawful or inconsiderate parking in our towns or provision of parking for residents who live in our district. There is an increasing problem of lack of residential parking in many of our communities – car ownership has increased significantly since streets were designed and houses built and it is a challenge for all towns and cities. We are reviewing current parking and garage provision for our council tenants across the district. The provision of any future additional parking however, needs to be economically viable, be subject to the planning process, and have the necessary agreement of Suffolk Highways.

Meetings

Cabinet, Council and Planning Committee meetings can be watched, either live or catch-up, on our YouTube channel. For agendas and minutes, please visit the Democratic services homepage on our website.

Coronavirus

Finally, I want to let you know something about Babergh's and Mid Suffolk's response to the Coronavirus crisis.

We are doing everything we can to look after our residents, communities and businesses. Our response to Covid-19 is part of a national plan, delivered locally using the resources and local knowledge of councils. It is firmly established now and working well, with our staff working hard to ensure we still function and also support all of our residents and businesses in need of help. We are also starting to plan for the recovery so we can be ready when the restrictions are lifted.

I do want to say at this point that all councillors realise how indebted and how lucky we are to have such a fantastic workforce looking after us all. Our Officers have stepped up and performed heroically to respond to a rapidly changing and deteriorating national situation. This is particularly true of our Senior Leadership Team and Corporate Managers – so many of them have been working up to 18 hours a day and are exhausted.

We are fortunate that modern technology will allow us to manage a protracted period of isolation at home – online shopping, banking and other services make it easier to live as normally as possible, and Skype and Facetime mean we can still see friends and family. If this crisis had hit us even as little as 10 years ago things would have been very different and much more challenging.

Members of the two cabinets have regular briefings with officers via Skype. The government has now published the formal regulations for holding online council meetings at all levels of local government. Some parishes have started to do this and we will soon have online Cabinet meetings and we expect to have Council meetings via either Skype or Microsoft Teams.

Life will continue as normally as possible until the restrictions are lifted, although I am sure in the long run that this will be the start of a major change in the way councils and businesses operate with much more activity taking place in cyberspace.

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