

Parish Report – June 2024

Councillor Nicky Willshere
Rattlesden Ward

Email: Nicky.Willshere@Midsuffolk.gov.uk
Mobile: 07793610542

Upcoming elections and referendums

The next election within our district is on Thursday 4 July. More details about the UK general election, as well as all other elections and referendums being held on the same day, can be found on the council's website.

Councils' commercial property arm continues to outperform market

Babergh and Mid Suffolk's commercial property Investment Company raised more than £1.26m in net income last year.

This means that CIFCO Capital Ltd has now generated a net income of more than £12m for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, since being established jointly by councils in 2017.

During previous administrations, the councils borrowed a total of £99.2m to invest in its commercial property portfolio. This now comprises of 22 properties with 83 tenants, based mainly in the eastern region, strategically split across industrial, retail and office sectors in order to balance risk.

The cost of the loan repayments to the councils is then covered by income received from CIFCO, with further net income on top making a regular and significant contribution to the councils' finances.

A report going before the councils' joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee later this month, shows how high inflation and interest rate rises have hit commercial property values nationwide. As a result, the value of the CIFCO portfolio has decreased 2.58% since March 2023. However, the report also details how CIFCO is outperforming the rest of the market – with rental arrears consistently below 5% and empty properties representing just 3.4% of the portfolio compared to a market benchmark of 8.3%, thanks to a combination of company expertise, and the quality and diversity of its assets.

CIFCO is also investing in the reducing the environmental impact of its portfolio, with 50% of its properties now holding an EPC rating of C or above – and it is on track to meet its target of ensuring all properties have a C rating or above by 2027.

Funding boost for Babergh and Mid Suffolk communities

Town and parish councils across Babergh and Mid Suffolk are set to receive more than £1.2m in developer contributions to help community infrastructure keep pace with housing growth

Developers building homes within the districts are charged a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which the councils then reinvest in neighbourhoods via their towns and parish councils.

Of the £1.2m funding, 44 town and parish councils in Mid Suffolk will receive a share of a £592k Neighbourhood CIL payout, with 20 of Babergh's town and parishes receiving a portion of £677K.

The town and parish councils can then decide how to spend this money to best support the development of their local area and meets the needs of its community – with higher amounts paid to those with successful adopted Neighbourhood Plans.

Councils secure funding to improve swimming pool

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have both been awarded funding to help ease financial pressures and reduce the carbon footprint of the districts' swimming pools.

The successful bids for Sport England Phase Two Swimming Pool Grants funding will enable both Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and Hadleigh Pool & Leisure to install important equipment over the coming months.

In total, Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre has received £180,000 to fund pool covers and micro filtration work. Hadleigh Pool & Leisure received £103,500, with the funding also going toward pool covers as well as the replacement of fluorescent lighting with LED lighting.

Mid Suffolk agrees funding to support new Stowmarket Rangers initiative

Mid Suffolk District Council has committed £50,000 towards Stowmarket Town Council's plans for a new ranger's service, which will launch in the town later this summer.

The Town Rangers are set to take on a number of responsibilities, including additional cleaning, tackling 'grot-spots' and improving the local environment.

The service requires new vehicles, including one kitted out with pressure washing equipment, and Mid Suffolk's £50,000 grant to Stowmarket Town Council will go towards this cost.

Food waste collections for Babergh and Mid Suffolk residents from 2026

Funding to begin food waste collections in Babergh and Mid Suffolk from 2026 has been agreed, as part of a nationwide requirement by central government

This month, cabinets at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have agreed funding to enable the introduction of food waste collections from 2026. It follows a change in UK government legislation aimed at making recycling consistent across the country.

This makes it a statutory requirement for all local councils to collect food waste at the kerbside from 2026.

The agreed funding means the councils can now begin the process of sourcing new bins, lorries, and equipment, as well as recruiting additional bin crews.

Both councils have been allocated a portion of central government's £295m 'new burdens' funding to deliver the changes. However, this is not expected to cover the full costs, with cabinets agreeing further funding to cover the shortfall from their own council coffers. Babergh is set to receive just over £1m in new burdens funding with an anticipated shortfall of £259K.

Mid Suffolk will receive slightly more at £1.042m with an anticipated shortfall of £254K. Both councils are appealing the amount of funding they will receive and are waiting for further details from central government.

Once ready to roll out, residents will receive a new 23-litre food waste bin, as well as a 5-litre caddy for their kitchens. Flats and houses of multiple occupancy will receive larger communal bins.

Gateway 14 continues to take shape as £18million agreed for Skills and Innovation Centre

Funding of £18.8m has been agreed to create a Skills & Innovation Centre at Gateway 14 in Stowmarket – the latest development there to support business, create jobs, and boost the local economy.

Feel Good Suffolk helps over 2,000 people to improve their health and wellbeing

A service supporting Suffolk residents to make healthier choices has helped over 2,000 people to improve their health since its launch in October 2023.

Capital grant window reopens as £368k awarded in 23/24

Community groups can apply for capital grants once more as Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils highlight some successful projects from the 2023/24 financial year.

Capital grants help to cover the cost of a project up to a maximum of £10,000. Funding is available to help make improvements and repairs to social infrastructure, including anything from village halls and communal spaces to play areas and sports facilities.

In the 2023/24 financial year, a total of £367,803 was distributed across the districts to dozens of successful capital grant applicants, with £128,293 awarded in Babergh and the remaining £239,510 going to projects in Mid Suffolk.

Council Chair presents funds to two Thornham Magna charities

The outgoing Mid Suffolk District Council Chair, Cllr Rowland Warboys presents £1,055 to two charities in Thornham Magna.

Housing issues and Stowmarket regeneration among targets in council's new action plan

Mid Suffolk District Council's leader has outlined plans to address housing issues in the district, regenerate Stowmarket and further combat climate change.

Speaking at the Annual Council Meeting on Wednesday (22nd May), Cllr Andy Mellen said a new action plan included a raft of initiatives. He added: "We are focused not just on the problems of today. We want to make a positive impact long into the future."

It further builds on The Mid Suffolk Plan, which was adopted by the council in January and sets out a vision for the future of the district until 2027.