

Parish Report – August 2024

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Library extension and play facilities boosted by £600k fund

A £538,000 contribution to a library refurbishment is one of the projects to benefit from monies collected from developers in Mid Suffolk

Cabinet members at Mid Suffolk District Council met on Monday, 15 July and approved more than £600,000 of funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) bids.

CIL payments are a legal requirement paid by developers of residential sites across the districts, and earmarked for projects which help local infrastructure keep pace with developments.

Bids made for CIL funding are regularly reviewed by the Councils, and two in Mid Suffolk have been successful in the latest round.

Stowmarket Library will receive £538,000 for an extension and refurbishment, while Debenham Recreation Ground receives £74,000 for new play facilities.

Planning go ahead for green tenants at Gateway 14

Planning consent has been granted for two buildings at Gateway 14, Stowmarket, both occupied by manufacturers of eco-friendly construction materials

Assan Panel, a major affiliate of Kibar Holding, a renowned name in Turkey's industrial sector that manufactures sandwich panel construction materials and exports to 85 countries across the world, will invest £45m in an 86,565 sq ft manufacturing building, bringing around 100 jobs to the area.

They will be joined on Gateway 14 by Bauder – a leading international manufacturer of building construction materials, specialising in quality flat roof waterproofing systems, insulation, green roofs and rooftop solar PV to make buildings watertight, thermally efficient and positively support the environment. The company, which has its UK operations in Ipswich, plans to occupy a 44,000 sq ft distribution centre at the park.

Reserved matters planning permission was granted for both buildings at Mid Suffolk District Council's planning committee on Wednesday 17 July. Both tenants will also now benefit from Gateway 14's inclusion as part of the Freeport

East zone, giving occupiers significant tax benefits and wider support to drive productivity and benefits for local communities.

Gateway 14 is being developed by Gateway 14 Ltd – a wholly owned subsidiary of Mid Suffolk District Council, in conjunction with its development partner Jaynic. Construction on both units is expected to start on site imminently.

Additional funding approved to allow vulnerable residents to stay in their own homes

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have this week agreed to increase grants to carry out home adaptations for some of their most vulnerable residents

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have this week agreed to increase grants to carry out home adaptations for some of their most vulnerable residents – helping them to retain their independence in their own homes for as long as possible.

Both cabinets agreed to increase funding to support more households to carry out home adaptations for family members with a disability, long term illness or change in health.

The increased levels of support, with grants available from £1K up to £15K will allow more residents to carry out the home adaptations needed to help them remain in their home and, in some cases, speed up hospital discharges.

The 2024 Housing Assistance Policy takes into consideration the growing cost of carrying out minor adaptations in the home and supports the councils' aspirations to support residents to live as healthily, safely, and independently as possible within sustainable communities.

The enhanced grants include doubling minor adaptation grant limits and introducing offers of a 'top up' of up to £20,000 above to the national disabled facilities grant limit.

Initiative to tackle inequality reaches 100,000 participation and meals milestone

A project backed by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils has reached an important milestone.

An initiative, backed by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, designed to encourage young people to exercise and enjoy outdoor activities has reached an important milestone.

The Explore Outdoor project, operated by Abbeycroft, marked its tenth birthday with an event at West Stow Saxon Village and celebrated reaching 100,000 participants as well as 100,000 meals provided.

When children and families take part in the initiative, they can experience a range of different activities, such as family park cooking sessions, the reducing isolation with food project, adventure days, teen challenges, and beyond.

In Babergh and Mid Suffolk, Explore Outdoor activities are a recurring feature of the free, government-funded, Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme. The councils work in partnership with Abbeycroft to provide families with the opportunity to experience exciting days out that don't break the bank.

Hundreds to get £50 off council tax bills as Mid Suffolk agrees new cost-of-living support

Mid Suffolk District Council has agreed new cost-of-living support for residents - including cuts to hundreds of council tax bills, and stepping in to replace a Government fund which ends in October.

Under the first new measure, residents who already pay reduced council tax rates could see a further cut of up to £50 from their bills.

In the second, Mid Suffolk will provide money to extend a Household Support Fund, which offers help to those struggling with the likes of rent and service charges. Currently, the Government funds this scheme nationwide, but it is expected to end in October.

Mid Suffolk District Council agreed the new measures at a full council meeting on Thursday, 25 July.

More than 3,000 residents in the district already receive 100% council tax discount. However, a further 1,400 pay a reduced amount, and it is these residents who will have up to £50 cut from their bills, depending on how much council tax they have left to pay.

The council agreed £85,000 to fund this new Council Tax Support Award for 2024/25.

It also agreed £40,000 to extend the Mid Suffolk Household Support Fund. Currently, the Government funds this scheme, but that is set to end in October.

In addition to assisting tenants with their housing costs, the fund will have increased flexibility to help those in need with their energy bills, food costs, school uniform costs, and other wider essentials where needed.

Councils first in country to clear the way for listed building energy upgrades

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils will clear the way for thousands of listed building owners to make sensitive energy efficiency upgrades – in a new approach which is the first of its kind in the country.

The districts have thousands of listed properties, but these often suffer from poor energy performance due to factors such as poorly fitting windows and single glazing.

This leads to higher bills for owners and is costly for the environment. Historic England has stated that retrofitting historic buildings will be fundamental in achieving net zero. The UK has the oldest housing stock in Europe, which is a huge contributor to carbon emissions.

Owners who want to make upgrades must currently apply to the councils for Listed Building Consent.

But Babergh and Mid Suffolk, working closely with Historic England, will be the first councils in the country to introduce an ambitious package of measures to make sensitive improvements quicker and easier.

The first is a Local Listed Building Consent Order, allowing Grade II listed property owners to upgrade or replace windows without having to make individual applications, subject to conditions.

The second is a Local Development Order, allowing solar PV and other renewable technologies to be installed on unlisted buildings within the curtilage of a Grade II listed property, also subject to conditions.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk join bid to boost local tourism

Suffolk Public Sectors Leaders group – which includes Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils – has agreed to a five-year funding programme to help enhance tourism across the region.

The group, which consists of county, district, borough council, police and medical chiefs, has committed to a five-year funding programme of £110k annually, with the opportunity to review after three.

This matches funding already agreed by Norfolk County Council, overseen by Visit England as part of a new Local Visitor Economy Partnership to enhance tourism in Suffolk and Norfolk.

This collaboration aims to boost the visitor economy, promote sustainability, inclusivity, and accessibility, and ensure equitable benefits for both counties.

Locality Budget

Each Councillor has a budget of £7,350 to allocate. Eligible projects range from improvements to community facilities and sports clubs, to wildflower planting, and the purchasing of equipment for youth groups or community shops. I have sent the 2024/25 form to all parish clerks.