

Parish Report – October 2024

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New community transport services to better connect Mid Suffolk

Two new community transport services are to launch in Mid Suffolk next month – to better connect local communities and reduce emissions

The new services have been funded by Mid Suffolk District Council's Rural Transport Grants Scheme, after £820,000 was ringfenced for rural transport provision as part of the council's 2022/23 budget.

The two new services will provide community transport options for residents wanting to travel to and from Stowmarket from surrounding villages, and also connect communities in Debenham, Eye and beyond.

From 1 November, Mid Suffolk Taxi Bus operated by Swift Taxi Cabs will provide transport services across central and south Mid Suffolk.

Initially, they will have two routes available - <https://www.suffolktaxibus.com/stowmarket-circular-via-thurston> and <https://www.suffolktaxibus.com/stowmarket-circular-via-bacton> . These routes have been chosen with the areas having been identified as having the greatest immediate need – such as lack of current provision.

Journeys will be free on 1 November to mark the launch. They will then cost a flat rate of £6, with customers able to book and pay online in advance or pay in cash onboard.

A further five routes will then be added over the coming year – with the introduction of the Stowmarket Circular via Debenham, the Debenham Circular via Eye, and the Stowmarket Circular via Wattisham Airfield, with more expected to be added at a later stage.

Details are and will become available as routes emerge via <https://www.suffolktaxibus.com/faq>

The service also offers opportunities <https://heartofsuffolk.co.uk/invest/news-and-events/advertising-opportunity-for-mid-suffolk-businesses/> , including onboard digital advertisements.

From 4 November, the Rural Connect community bus service operated by Communities Together East Anglia will provide transport services across north Mid Suffolk.

This will operate as 'demand responsive' with a pre-bookable door-to-door service. Scheduled routes may be developed at a later stage if there is shown to be demand.

It will cover three geographical areas: Eye and Diss, Eye and Debenham, and Stowmarket - connecting people living in outlying villages with local towns and beyond. It will use a fully electric vehicle as part of the fleet.

Bookings can be made via phone or email up to two weeks in advance, or via card payment on board. Journeys will cost:

- 1 to 4 miles - £ 3.00
- 5 to 7 miles - £ 4.50
- 8 to 10 miles - £ 6.50
- 11 to 13 miles - £8.00
- 14 to 16 miles - £10.00
- 17 to 20 miles - £ 12.00

Strategic stops at rail stations, colleges, as well as employment and leisure hubs, are designed to support commuting residents of all ages.

Both operators will have the flexibility for cross-over where occasionally needed.

The aim of Mid Suffolk District Council's <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/rural-transport-grants-scheme> is to increase the number of alternatives to solo car journeys. This will, in turn, help lower emissions and improve air quality in line with the council's and the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership's net zero emissions targets.

Each service is trialling a different mode of community transport to test user demand and long-term viability.

In bringing forward these new provisions, the council has, and will continue, to closely monitor other related projects across the county and beyond. They include local taxi-bus pilots, a number of Government grant schemes, and existing community transport provision, such as Suffolk County Council's 'Connecting Communities'.

The Mid Suffolk Taxi Bus and Rural Connect are designed to be complimentary to these existing services.

Redundant school site provides top class council homes

Next month 24 families will pick up the keys to their new town centre homes, following the transformation of the former Stowmarket Middle School site into affordable rent council housing.

Mid Suffolk District Council purchased the redundant site from the local education authority to provide high-quality homes for lower income households, after the site was left empty by the closure of the school in 2015.

Working in partnership with contractors Pentaco Construction Ltd, the council has now created 38 high quality affordable homes at the town centre site, offering a mix of affordable rent, social rent and shared ownership homes at below market value to meet a wide range of needs.

Cllr Richard Winch, cabinet member for housing and property at Mid Suffolk District Council was on hand with representatives from the council to receive the keys from Pentaco Construction and inspect the new homes – consisting of six one-bedroom flats, eight two-bedroom flats, 13 two-bedroom houses, 1 two-bedroom bungalow, eight three-bedroom houses and two four-bedroom houses.

Of those, 14 homes have been made available for affordable rent (where tenants pay less than local market rent), ten for social rent and 14 shared ownership homes – supporting people to climb onto the first rung of the property ladder.

Fund launched with £270,000 available for community projects

Mid Suffolk District Council has opened applications to a “unique” new fund which will make £270,000 available to community organisations and projects over the next three years.

The Progress Power Community Benefit Fund has been provided by power generation business Drax as part of the development of the Progress Power Station on the former Eye Airfield site. £90,000 has been made available by the company each year to support local projects in the vicinity of the power station, with the fund and grant applications administered by Mid Suffolk District Council.

It has been set up to support local VCFSE (voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise) organisations in the parishes of Eye, Yaxley, Mellis, Brome and Oakley, and Thrandeston within their communities.

Funding can be used for a wide range of initiatives, as long as they address gaps in provision in one of the following areas:

- Children, young people, older people and the vulnerable - especially projects focussed on improving access to recreational activities and essentials services.
- Carbon reduction, sustainability and environmental projects -including those involved with improving community land such as parkland, allotments, recreation grounds and other open spaces.

- Protecting, maintaining and improving community buildings.
- Health and self-help grounds, particularly projects that will provide self-help services in the community and make access to health services easier.
- Education and skills development - providing support for those seeking access to training opportunities as well as granting bursaries to local students.
- Heritage - celebrating and protecting local heritage for current and future generations.
- Community regeneration - working to improve other factors in day-to-day life such as crime levels, employment, housing and beyond.

Crucial grant aimed at tackling social isolation in winter returns for second year

A grant aimed at tackling social isolation in winter has returned for a second year, thanks to funding from Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils.

The Living Well in Winter grant will help local organisations such as town and parish councils, village hall or playing field committees, sports clubs and sports centres, charities, social enterprises, community shops, and community interest companies deliver new and existing accessible spaces and activities during the colder months.

Last year, a total of 34 projects received funding from the grant (20 in Babergh and 14 in Mid Suffolk). Successful projects included community cafes, additional family sessions at preschools, coffee and chat sessions, and activity clubs.

Now, the grant window has opened again, enabling applicants to address issues like social isolation and decreased physical activity, which are exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, particularly during the winter.

Other eligible projects might also include lunch clubs, after-school clubs, the continuation of warm spaces, subsidised family sports sessions, hobby workshops and beyond.

Organisations can apply for a minimum of £500 and a maximum of £2,000, and have until Friday, 8 November to do so.