

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT APRIL

£3.8m pledged for energy efficient council homes

21/03/24

Work to make council homes warmer and bring down energy bills for tenants across Babergh and Mid Suffolk received a £1.6m boost in government funding this week as part of the latest round of awards from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

The funding is to be added to the £2.25m already committed by the councils to install energy saving measures in social housing, taking the total investment pledged for retrofitting and decarbonising to £3.85m across both districts.

The funding is to help lower income households by delivering warm and energy efficient homes and lifting tenants out of fuel poverty by saving money on their energy bills. Mid Suffolk intend to use the money for retrofitting and decarbonising their social housing.

Work is now underway to target council properties with the lowest EPC (energy performance certificate) ratings, with improvements to be carried out over the next two years.

New online hub launches for National Infrastructure Projects

On 26th March, the Planning Inspectorate announced the launch of 'Find a National Infrastructure Project', the new online service for national infrastructure planning.

<https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/>

Bramford to Twinstead and Norwich to Tilbury

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have formally objected to National Grid's plans for more electricity pylons between Bramford and Twinstead – saying the impact on the countryside is too great.

The Grid wants to reinforce the network to create additional capacity but the councils say there are significant shortcomings with its proposals.

The comments were made in their submission to the national Planning Inspectorate, which has just completed the examination stage of the proposal, ahead of preparing a report for the Secretary of State, who will make a final decision.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk said National Grid had not fully considered the impact on tourism – describing this as a “serious omission.”

The councils also remain concerned about the cumulative impacts with other development within the area, including the proposals for an additional powerline from Norwich to Tilbury, which would also connect to the Bramford substation. Cllr Andrew Stringer for MSDC said that National Grid needed a joined-up plan “which doesn't sacrifice what makes our landscape so special” and which delivers sustainable benefits to the communities affected.

The councils also call for additional measures around the Bramford substation to mitigate the impacts of this and other developments connected to it and enabled by the Bramford to Twinstead project.

CIL Expenditure Levy – Sixth Review

Mid Suffolk District Council approved amendments to the March 2024 CIL Expenditure Framework at the Council Meeting on 20th March. They also agreed the need for a further (seventh) CIL Expenditure Review to be informed by the Joint Member Panel while Bid round 14 is taking place (October 2024). This will ensure that any amended scheme is in place before Bid round 15 opens in May 2025. Clarity around projects eligible for funding included the disqualification of

community pubs given the risks around these operations and the fact that they are not classed as infrastructure.

Projects which can continue to be supported by CIL include Sports Clubs, Tennis and Cricket clubs, community-lead projects involving community shops and cafes, churches, library extensions and improvements and provision for walking/cycling and footpaths.

Where any problems with funding are identified (such as the project's community benefits not yet being realised) the Joint Member Panel recommend that Infrastructure Officers work with the CIL Bidder, the Ward Member and the Parish Council in a positive and constructive way.

MSDC Joint Homelessness Reducation and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024

The Council adopted the draft Strategy and the associated Delivery Plan at their meeting on 20th March 2024.

The Plan includes five priorities which were supported by the results of an online consultation:

- Early upstream prevention and intervention
- Making rough sleeping brief and non-recurring
- Ensuring the health and wellbeing needs of households are met whilst in temporary accommodation
- Expanding and future proofing the role and remit of Central Suffolk Lettings to continue to improve access to the private rented sector.
- Mitigating against the impacts of cost-of-living.

There will be a fast track referral system to Central Suffolk Lettings to ensure cases subject to the Rent Guarantee Scheme are prioritised and dealt with effectively.

Online immigration status (eVisa) update – event and resources

Throughout 2024, the government is replacing physical immigration documents with digital proof of immigration status for people already living in the UK and new visa customers too.

An eVisa is a digital record of a person's immigration status and the latest information on them is available at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/online-immigration-status-evisa>

This process is already underway, and individuals in the UK who applied for their visa through the EU Settlement Scheme or used the ID check app already have a digital proof of their immigration status.

The Home Office is hosting events over the next few months where you can learn more about the changes and how they might affect people. The first event will take place on 8 April.

Councils are encouraged to join the event, and there will also be other sessions held over the next few months.

Flu and COVID-19 surveillance report updated

On 21st March, the UK Health Security Agency published the latest national influenza and COVID-19 activity, seasonal flu and other seasonal respiratory illnesses.

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/flu-and-covid-19-surveillance-report-published>).

Between 18th and 24th March 2024 influenza activity decreased, and COVID-19 activity remained broadly stable. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) activity fluctuated at low levels across most indicators.

COVID-19 vaccination: spring 2024 campaign resources – reminder

People aged 75 years and over, those in care homes, and those aged 6 months and over with a weakened immune system are being offered a spring dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Bookings for the spring booster vaccination will be offered between April and June, with those at highest risk being called in first. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is keen to encourage everyone who is eligible to come forward.

DHSC has produced a leaflet in a number of languages designed to increase awareness of the COVID-19 spring booster offer.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-spring-booster-resources>

Councils are encouraged to share information about the COVID-19 spring booster vaccination programme via their communication channels.

Funding for councils to introduce weekly food waste collections

On 25 March, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced that councils in England will be supported with up to £295 million in government funding to introduce weekly food waste collections by 31 March 2026.

The funding will cover new food waste containers for homes and specialist collection vehicles, targeted at councils that have yet to fully put food waste service in place

Fly-tipping: council responsibilities- Guidance

Last week (28 March) the government outlined how councils must deal with fly-tipping and the penalties they can charge. The guidance sets out councils' responsibilities.

<https://www.keepbritain tidy.org/fly-tipping-advice-individuals-landowners-businesses>

Councils are encouraged to share as appropriate.

Biodiversity net gain now applies to small developments.

Today, (2 April), the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announced biodiversity net gain is mandatory for small developments of fewer than 9 houses on less than one hectare of land.

<https://defraenvironment.blog.gov.uk/2024/04/02/biodiversity-net-gain-now-applies-to-small-developments/>

Biodiversity net gain has applied to major developments since February.

Consultation on changes to various permitted development rights – reminder

On 13 February, the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities launched a consultation seeking views on changes to existing development rights that allow for householder development, i.e.

- building upwards to create new homes,
- the demolition of certain buildings and rebuilding as homes,
- electric vehicle charge points
- air source heat pumps.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-various-permitted-development-rights-consultation>

The consultation closes on 9 April.