

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT JULY 25

Beautiful walks and foodie gems celebrated in new project

Stunning walks and fantastic places to eat are showcased across Babergh and Mid Suffolk in a new initiative.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have developed the 'Grazing Walks' guide highlighting perfect places to enjoy a picturesque walk followed by a treat at a local pub, cafe or independent shop.

With more than 20 locations highlighted, its aim is to encourage more people to explore our unspoilt countryside, be active, and support local business.

Cllr Tim Weller, Mid Suffolk's cabinet member for environment, culture and wellbeing, said: "We want people to savour the scenery of our beautiful district, and then sample some of Suffolk's finest ingredients.

"It is so good for all of us to get outside, get some fresh air, and work up an appetite. I really hope people enjoy these trails, which I think showcase our beautiful towns and villages and help us appreciate what's on our own doorstep."

The Mid Suffolk guide includes locations such as Thornham Magna, Thwaite, Thorndon and many more. The Babergh guide highlights the villages between the Wool Towns including Kersey, Assington and Boxford, among others.

Details of each location, maps of the walks available, and places to eat, are available on the Heart of Suffolk website

- heartofsuffolk.co.uk/grazing-walks

Community events return this summer

Communities in Babergh and Mid Suffolk are set for another summer of fun as a hugely popular series of free events returns for another year.

This year, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are partnering with Abbeycroft to deliver Community Fun Days at four locations across the districts – Sudbury, Hadleigh, Thurston and Stowmarket.

Families that attend one of the events can look forward to a wide range of activities, from bouncy castles and axe throwing to arts and crafts and dancing.

In addition to the activities, there will be numerous information stalls from local organisations and charities, providing access to valuable resources, support and information.

The events are scheduled to take place between 10am and 2pm at:

- Sudbury, Belle Vue Park – Monday, 21 July
- Thurston, New Green – Thursday, 24 July
- Hadleigh Pool and Leisure Centre – Friday, 25 July
- Stowmarket, Recreation Ground – Monday, 28 July

Each Community Fun Day is free to attend and has activities for all ages – simply turn up on the day. However, children that receive means tested free school meals are able to pre-book some activities and order a free lunch by [visiting the Abbeycroft website](#).

MSDC Pride in your Place grant returns

Applications for this grant have reopened, offering funding to projects that bolster community pride and celebrate the heritage of towns and villages across the district. These grants are for £250 to £5,000 (with a total pot of £50,000) and are available to town and parish councils, village hall or playing field committees, sports clubs and centres and community shops and pubs.

In the previous funding window which opened in November 2024, the Pride in Your Place grant was used to fund 20 unique projects.

Successful applications included a new history trail in Bramford, footpath resurfacing in Thorndon, improvements to the engineer's memorial in Eye and a new bus stop bench in Gislingham.

Improving the efficiency of windows in listed buildings

Many listed buildings suffer from poor energy performance due to badly fitting windows and single glazing. Anyone who wants to make an upgrade currently has had to apply for listed building consent, but the process is set to be made a lot easier in respect of grade two listed buildings. Under a trial scheme between Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils and Historic England upgrades should be much quicker and easier to install. This would also apply to double glazing installed and introduced after the property was listed and those which were already installed within a modern extension.

Mid Suffolk District Council Meeting 26.06.25

Two motions were introduced at Thursday evening's meeting. The first related to the introduction of more 20 mph speed limit zones across Suffolk where there is local support. The motion, by Councillor Jen Overett, called for Suffolk County Council to review its criteria for speed limits. Currently, Suffolk County Council says it's confident that speed limits are largely appropriate across Suffolk and rules out 20mph speed limits on any A or B roads or roads with existing mean speeds above 30mph. However, it also says a review is underway to make it simpler for residents and parishes to apply for 20mph zones. Discussion on the topic drew attention to high costs which communities would have to pay in order to demonstrate current levels of speeding. I spoke about concerns at Little Blakenham, especially in relation to the safety of horse riders. The motion was passed by all but two councillors.

The second motion, brought forward by Councillor Terence Carter focussed on the need for one of the councillors to become a disability champion to act as a liaison point with the disabled community and promote accessibility across all council decisions and strategies. The disability champion would work closely with the Mid Suffolk Disability Forum to ensure that their priorities are evaluated and actioned. The motion also suggests that councillors be provided with mandatory

training on disability awareness, inclusive planning and the social model of disability. The motion was passed unanimously.

Funding to support arts and cultural organisations in England

On 29 May, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, (DCMS) announced that arts and cultural organisations will be able to apply for a share of £85 million from the government for vital repairs and upgrades:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/85-million-to-support-arts-and-cultural-organisations-across-the-countrygrades>.

The new Creative Foundations Fund will help arts venues in England to address a range of issues, such as repairing building infrastructure, outdated or failing systems, inefficient energy systems and inaccessible spaces. It will ensure beloved local venues like theatres, performing arts venues, galleries, grassroots music venues and contemporary arts centres can continue.

Arts and cultural organisations in England are encouraged to apply for a share of up to £10 million each from the fund.

The online portal to register expressions of interest for the Creative Foundations Fund opens on 30 June. Full guidance, including eligibility criteria and details of how to apply can be found on Arts Council England's website.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

Reminder: Funding to protect historic buildings

In April, the government announced that communities in England can now apply for a share of almost £20 million to help care for historic buildings and heritage sites in their local area.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/local-heritage-to-be-protected-with-20-million-of-funding>

The new £4.85 million Heritage Revival Fund
<https://ahfund.org.uk/grants/england/>

is currently accepting applications for projects that will help to rescue and repurpose neglected historic buildings, like theatres, department

Hot weather communications toolkit 2025

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has produced a hot weather communications toolkit for 2025

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1D36CV8tkV3WOIWk7UPQy30tRz1KUOTAg>

to help provide basic health information that can be communicated during hot spells so that the right messages reach the right people at the right time.

The material in the toolkit is largely the same as last year, with an additional section containing information on other hazards which can occur during the summer months including thunderstorm asthma, flash flooding and drought. The toolkit supports UKHSA's Adverse Weather and Health Plan and Weather-in-Health Alerting (WHA) system which issues Heat-Health Alerts (HHA).

The core alerting season for HHAs started on 1 June, ending on 30 September. Individuals and organisations that wish to receive the

impact based HHA must register to receive the alerts which are also publicly available on the UKHSA Data Dashboard.

The East Midlands, South East, South West, London, and East of England will be under an amber alert from 27th June, while a yellow alert has been issued for Yorkshire and Humber, and the West Midlands.

Data dashboard:

<https://ukhsa-dashboard.data.gov.uk/weather-health-alerts/heat>

Consultation Outcome: Funding for the Homelessness Prevention Grant from 2026-2027

Earlier this year, the Ministry of Housing & Communities conducted a review of the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) formula.

The consultation closed on 11 March 2025, and 189 responses were received in total.

On Friday 20th June, a summary of the responses was published which details the government's response and next steps towards updating the funding arrangements for the Homelessness Prevention Grant from 2026-27 onwards.

There was some support for using Housing Benefit plus Universal Credit claimants to reflect homelessness demand. However, a significant number of respondents felt that this did not fully capture pressures from households that are working and not in receipt of benefits. Responses suggested that the use of Mean Rents in the Private Rented Sector, alongside a labour cost adjustment might give a clearer picture.

Final decisions will be taken later this year when budgets are confirmed, considering the amount of funding available and taking account of the consultation feedback.

The Fair Funding Reform

Local government runs around 800 essential services that we all rely on, support the most vulnerable, and are the foundation of a functioning state.

The demand for, and cost of, services has increased significantly – and that this has made the job for local authorities in recent years much harder.

Earlier this year, the government announced the £69 billion financial Settlement for 2025-26 - a 6.8% cash terms increase, with £600 million being directed through a one-off Recovery Grant to sustain councils with historical low tax bases and higher levels of deprivation. At the Spending Review earlier this month, they also announced over £5 billion of new grant funding over the next three years.

Competitive bidding for funding pots is going to end, to be replaced by multi-year financial Settlements in 2025-27 that will give local leaders the certainty and stability they need to plan for the future.

At the Spending Review additional funding was announced for preventative services. This will keep more families together, improving outcomes for children and reducing local authority costs, while joining up disparate agencies and support services.

The Government's reasoning is that too many areas have felt the combined impact of reducing government support and low historical tax bases to raise income from. This has been coupled with high levels of need driving up demand for services, which have shifted from early intervention and prevention to crisis management.

Adjustments will be made for the costs of remoteness faced by rural communities, and the ability of individual local authorities to raise Council Tax, while also resetting business rates income. Initially local councils will be worse off with the ending of the rural services delivery grant – which last year totalled over £100m. This is one of a number of funds being “repurposed” to redirect funding towards more deprived areas. We will wait to see whether Mid Suffolk counts as a “deprived area”.

Mid Suffolk are basing financial plans on a “worst case” scenario in that their Medium Term Financial Forecast is based on a pessimistic perspective of no future Government funding and a significant drop in Business rates income. Similarly Mid Suffolk’s Capital and Treasury Strategies, approved last February, sets the Capital Programme and associated borrowing limits at “a prudent and affordable level”,

Update: Drainage standards

On Thursday (19 June) the Department for Transport announced that the government are updating the national standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems to help tackle water pollution and protect communities from flooding.

The new standards will give developers clearer guidance on how to create rainwater management systems that mimic the natural environment and deliver better outcomes.

Key features of the new standards include:

- Reducing flood risk by actively managing surface water on site
- Improving water quality before it enters rivers and streams
- Provide community benefits by creating more attractive and resilient places to live and work
- Prioritising solutions that enhance biodiversity and green space
- Encouraging water efficiency, by enabling the reuse of rainwater through harvesting and collection systems

- Emphasising long-term maintenance and performance

Faster Planning Appeal Procedures

On 25th June, the government announced new regulations to streamline the planning appeals process. Expected to begin by the end of 2025, the reform is about enabling planning appeal decisions to be made more quickly.

Under the new process the majority of written representation appeals will accept only the evidence put before the local planning authority during application. This will allow a full body of evidence to be provided at application stage, giving local planning authorities the information they need to make decisions, keeping decisions local.

Public health updates:

Home-testing kits available as part of the cervical screening programme

Today (24 June) the UK government announced it will offer home-testing kits for cervical cancer screening

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-testing-kits-for-lifesaving-checks-against-cervical-cancer>

as part of a new 10-year health plan. These kits are for those who have missed their regular screenings. The goal is to make it easier for people to get tested by allowing them to do it at home. This initiative aims to increase participation in cervical cancer screening and catch more cancers early.

Earlier this week (20 June), the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) was warning of variations in the uptake of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine across England. These variations increase the risk of cervical and other HPV-related cancers in areas with lower vaccination rates. The HPV vaccine is available for free until age 25

through GP surgeries. The UKHSA emphasises the importance of both vaccination and cervical screening to prevent cervical cancer. Despite some improvements, vaccination rates remain below pre-pandemic levels.

Councils are encouraged to share with public health colleagues to promote vaccine uptake and awareness of the new home testing kits.

Advice accepted on autumn 2025 COVID-19 vaccination programme

On the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation the autumn 2025 vaccination programme will target people who are at the highest risk of serious illness to protect the most vulnerable. Vaccination will be offered in England in Autumn 2025 to:

- Adults aged 75 years and over
- Residents in a care home for older adults
- Individuals aged 6 months and over who are immunosuppressed.

The government encourages anyone who is eligible for COVID-19 vaccination to come forward for vaccination this autumn.

Reminder: UKHSA urges travellers to take steps to avoid infection abroad

Earlier this month (10 June), the UK Health Security Agency reported an increase in travel-associated enteric fever cases (typhoid fever and paratyphoid fever) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These are serious preventable illnesses caused by Salmonella bacteria, usually spread through contaminated food or water.

Meanwhile, provisional data shows that imported malaria cases remain at concerning levels in the UK. There were fewer imported dengue cases reported in the first quarter of 2025 compared to last year in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Travel Health Pro website, <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/>

supported by UKHSA, has information on health risks in countries across the world. It is a one-stop-shop for information to help people plan their trip abroad.

*Adrienne Marriott
Blakenham District Councillor
01/07/25*