

## **DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT MAY 25**

# **Devolution & Local Government Reorganisation Update**

Mid Suffolk District Council has just received some Government feedback on their interim proposal for reorganisation. I will summarise a few of the points cited by the government:

- Boundaries for new unitary councils should ideally be based around existing district and borough council borders
- Existing local plans will still be valid until new ones are constructed by the unitary council(s).
- The government will give £7.6m to be spread out over 21 areas (including Norfolk/Suffolk). However, beyond that areas will be expected to meet transition costs from existing budgets
- The government have reiterated that a 500K population per unitary council is not a hard target
- There will be a need to demonstrate efficiency savings and value for money associated with any unitary council arrangement we decide upon.
- If the proposed arrangement involves any fragmentation of services, e.g. in social care, children's services, SEND, homelessness, the government want details of how these services can be maintained.
- In final proposal(s) the government "would welcome details on plans for neighbourhood-based governance, the impact on parish councils and thoughts about formal neighbourhood partnerships and area committees as well as ideas for public engagement.
- They also want continued engagement with the Police and Crime Commissioner, MPs and wider local stakeholders as well as effective collaboration between all councils and the need to use common data sets to enable effective data sharing.

## **Free compost for Babergh and Mid Suffolk residents**

The Councils are offering free compost to their residents this month to coincide with International Compost Awareness Week (4 – 10 May). A collection has already taken place in Eye; however another is scheduled at Needham Market Lake on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May from 8 a.m. Attendees will be allowed up to two bags per vehicle. This will be on a first come first served basis.

## **Solar partnership boosts businesses**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have teamed up with West Suffolk District Council to offer companies access to the Solar for Business Initiative. The scheme has been running successfully in West Suffolk for nine years. Businesses can sign up to have solar panels provided and installed on their premises for free. Electricity generated by the panels is then sold to the business at a rate lower than their current tariff helping to reduce their energy bills. To be eligible businesses in Mid Suffolk, Babergh or West Suffolk must have a minimum electricity consumption of 5,000kWh per year. To find out about the scheme email: [environment@westsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:environment@westsuffolk.gov.uk), call 01284 657631 or visit [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/solarforbusiness](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/solarforbusiness).

## **CIL funding**

Twenty Eight Town and Parish Council in Mid Suffolk are to receive £539K in all from the recent round of CIL funding. The latest bid round will be open from 1 May to 31 May 2025. Further information about how CIL works can be found on the council's website: Community Infrastructure Levy – Babergh District Council – Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils – Working Together.

## **Mid Suffolk residents with Parkinson's Disease offered free membership at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre**

The Leisure Centre in Stowmarket, run by Everyone Active in partnership with Mid Suffolk District Council is offering free membership to Mid Suffolk residents living with Parkinson's.

Nineteen people are currently benefitting from the scheme and those living with the condition can find various activities such as swimming, walking and dance to be beneficial in managing their symptoms. For further information or to join visit the Everyone Active website:

<https://www.everyoneactive.com/>.

## **Plug-In Suffolk Car Fund**

In an eighteen month trial, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, together with Connected Kerb will be providing EV charge points for a new scheme to enable Suffolk residents and visitors to rent out electric cars. This a collaborative project is funded by Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group comprising Chief Executive and Leaders of Suffolk councils, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Chief Constable and Chief ICB Officers. Cars will be available to rent is Stowmarket, Needham Market (Station Yard Car Park), Hadleigh and Sudbury. The scheme will be extended to include two Ipswich locations, Lowestoft, Bury St. Edmunds, Woodbridge and Newmarket. To take advantage of this scheme, visit the Plug in Suffolk Car Club webpage via SCC's website.

## **New Mid Suffolk Culture Fund**

Nine organisations have received a share of £100,505 for culturally-related projects in Mid Suffolk, including Dance East whose dementia support classes were funded as well as the John Peel Centre and the Food Museum. The next application window is set to open in October

2005 when another £100,000 will become available for charities and organisations such as voluntary and community groups.

## **New-look Community Development Fund**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have given out £583,000 as part of new grant funding with £312,00 going to projects in Mid Suffolk. The new fund is taken from both capital and revenue funding making the application simpler for organisations to complete. Local voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations could apply for up to £20,000 towards the provision of new or existing services. Citizens Advice services in both Council areas each receive £100,000. Cllr Teresa Davis, MSDC cabinet member for thriving communities notes that there is still some funding available under the terms of this grant. For those interested, the fund window will reopen in Mid Suffolk on 1 June.

## **Local Government Association consultation: local government and legal responsibilities to act on climate change**

The purpose of this consultation is to get the views of councils and interested parties including government departments, non-governmental organisations, interest groups, think tanks, alliances and more, on whether councils should be set a statutory duty/duties to act on climate change.

Views are welcome on any other issues not covered by the questions via email at [climateaction@local.gov.uk](mailto:climateaction@local.gov.uk)

<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/make-it-local/back-local-climate-action/local-government-and-legal-responsibilities>

The consultation is now open and will close on Friday 30 May 2025 at 11.45pm.

## **Forestry grants re-opened to support tree-planting**

On 24th April the government announced that up to £4.1 million is being made available across three grant offers to increase resilience and productivity in tree production:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/key-forestry-grants-re-opened-to-support-tree-planting-ambitions>

The grants have already seen funding awarded to a range of organisations across the public, private and third sectors, ranging from established tree and tree seed suppliers to new entrants to the sector.

- The Tree Production Capital Grant (up to £2 million) aims to help suppliers increase their productivity and resilience and is designed for tree and tree seed suppliers of all sizes, as well as new entrants looking to diversify into the sector. It closes for applications on 25 June.
- The Tree Production Innovation Fund (up to £1.5 million) provides funding for innovative projects designed to overcome barriers to domestic tree production and is designed to improve the quantity, quality and diversity of tree planting stock in England. It closes on 9 July.
- The Seed Sourcing Grant (up to £600,000) provides funding to improve the quantity, quality and diversity of tree seed sources in England and will help to ensure the availability of diverse planting stock to meet tree planting targets. It closes on 19 August.

## Funding to protect local heritage

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 is currently accepting applications for projects that will help to rescue and repurpose neglected historic buildings, like theatres, department stores and former banks. It will do this by supporting community organisations, charities and social enterprises in England to take ownership of these sites for community uses.

The programme will be delivered by the Architectural Heritage Fund  
<https://ahfund.org.uk/grants/england>

and will run from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026. This is in addition to the £15 million Heritage at Risk Capital Fund

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/grants/our-grant-schemes/heritage-at-risk-capital-fund/>

Expressions of Interest can be received from individuals or organisations, focusing on the most deprived areas to rescue at risk historic sites and buildings. This funding will support projects which seek to repair and enhance a variety of heritage buildings to benefit the local public and community, like shops, pubs, parks, and town halls.

## Supported Housing Regulation Consultation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/supported-housing-regulation-consultation>

This consultation seeks views on plans to implement measures set out in the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023. The government is proposing to introduce a locally-led licensing regime for supported housing across England and new National Supported Housing Standards. The consultation also seeks views on potentially linking Housing Benefit to the licensing regime and defining care, support and supervision in Housing Benefit regulations in England.

The consultation is an opportunity for providers, residents and stakeholders to help design an effective regulatory system that ensures supported housing delivers the support people need.

The consultation closes on 15 May. If you have any questions, please contact: [SupportedHousingConsultations@communities.gov.uk](mailto:SupportedHousingConsultations@communities.gov.uk)

## Planning guidance: letters to chief planning officers

On 30<sup>th</sup> April the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government issued a planning update newsletter to chief planning officers:

The newsletter highlights the launch of a new £1.2 million PropTech Innovation Challenge on 31 March. The challenge aims to find new digital and scalable solutions to help accelerate the delivery of 1.5 million new homes. Local planning authorities will be invited to test the

solutions as they are developed by digital partners. Further details are enclosed in the newsletter.

There is also reference in the newsletter to additional text added to Chapter 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework in December 2024 to support local authorities and developers to protect priority and threatened species. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by supporting biodiversity and protecting threatened species. This could be achieved by incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs.

## **Understanding the possession action process: guidance for landlords and tenants**

Earlier this month (8 April), the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government updated the guidance for landlords and tenants to explain the possession action process in the county courts in England:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-the-possession-action-process-guidance-for-landlords-and-tenants>

The private and social tenant guidance is to help tenants who have been served with a possession notice, which is the landlord's first step towards taking possession of the property. It provides detailed information about each stage of the possession action process, where the landlord makes a possession claim to the county court after serving a notice.

The guides also contain advice to help tenants and private landlords to resolve common disputes in tenancies, such as rent arrears and anti-social behaviour, without the matter needing to go to court.

## **Local audit reform: a strategy for overhauling the local audit system in England – government response published alongside funding to clear the local audit backlog**

On 9<sup>th</sup> April the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government published the government response to the consultation to overhaul local audit in England:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-audit-reform-a-strategy-for-overhauling-the-local-audit-system-in-england>

Sixteen commitments have been set out, including simplifying financial reporting requirements and increasing capacity to avoid reliance on a small number of auditors.

The reforms will be backed by up to £49 million of government funding to help councils clear their backlogs and cover the additional cost of restoring audit assurance. Releasing funds to councils will be reliant on compliance with statutory backstops and linked to the publication of audited accounts and audit fees being paid.

In addition, a further £15 million was paid to eligible local government bodies in March 2025 as part of an existing package to help meet the wider costs of meeting audit requirements and fees.

## **Measures to tackle fly-tipping vehicles announced**

On 29<sup>th</sup> April the government announced measures to tackle fly-tipping vehicles and clean up streets, lanes and rural areas:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/councils-to-seize-and-crush-fly-tipping-vehicles-to-clean-up-britain>

Councils will work with the police to identify, seize and crush vehicles. Drones and mobile CCTV cameras will be deployed to identify cars and vans belonging to fly-tippers so they can be destroyed. The government has launched a rapid review to reduce red tape blocking councils from seizing and crushing vehicles.

The Environment Agency will also carry out identity and criminal record checks on operators in the sector. They will now be able to fund the cost of policing the industry through permits, increasing their powers to revoke permits, issue enforcement notices and fines.

## **Public Health Update: Five-year Tuberculosis National Action Plan for England**

The latest data for England show that TB rates are rising, and TB epidemiology is changing. In 2023, England recorded its largest annual increase (11%) in TB cases since enhanced surveillance began in 2000. Provisional figures for 2024 indicate a further 13% rise in TB notifications compared to 2023, continuing the upward trend.

The new Tuberculosis National Action Plan (2026–31) aims to improve the prevention, detection, and control of TB in England by prioritising the most effective interventions, focusing on those most affected, and addressing health inequalities.

*Adrienne Marriott  
Blakenham District Councillor  
06/05/25*