



Annual Parish Report May 2021

Mid Suffolk District Council

Hinderclay

Looking back on 2020 – Mid Suffolk (and Babergh) like other local authorities have drastically changed the way business is conducted in response to the pandemic. The rapid transition to virtual and home working about a year ago took place smoothly largely thanks to the IT Team and much work behind the scenes. Customer interface moved to online or telephone as the service centres closed, although it is recognised that not everyone can access virtual communication. Meetings moved to virtual and Endeavour House has been closed for most purpose. Staff were redirected to support pandemic logistics working alongside colleagues from other organisations and community groups. It was a remarkable effort and now we are transitioning into recovery mode, never forgetting the lives lost and the losses experienced, empty high streets and businesses grounded.

Financial Support – The local council has played a major role in administering the wide range of Government Covid support grants announced over the past year, as well as some of our own discretionary grants. Some may be retrospective, and restart grants aimed for business rate payees are available as of April 1st. All businesses are encouraged to review eligibility or ring 01473-296444: <https://www.babergh.gov.uk/business/business-rates/grant-funding-schemes/>

New Joint Local Plan - The Draft Joint Local Plan underwent public consultation and pre-submission stage review over the past year and was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination at the end of March. Public hearings will follow the examination, anticipated in late Summer 2021. The Plan and supporting documents are available to view on the Babergh and Mid Suffolk websites at www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/jointlocalplan

Major Planning Developments – Several large scale proposals have come to Mid Suffolk over the past year. These include: three large-scale solar array proposals in the Flowton / Somersham / Bramford / Burstall area - ENSO cross-boundary applications (refs DC/20/05895 and DC/21/00060 and Greybarn Solar Energy Farm); Progress Power gas fired ‘peaking’ plant (operates as a back-up for renewables) near Eye with substation near Mellis recently received financial backing, having been dormant for almost 5 years it is likely to commence later in 2021; Snoasis which is a 120-ha proposal in Masons’s Quarry Blakenham, now renamed Valley Ridge, gained preliminary planning approval last April; plans for ‘Gateway 14’ were submitted in January 2021 for combined business, warehouse and industrial space in Stowmarket (Gateway 14 Ltd is a company wholly owned by Mid Suffolk District Council, and partnered with developer Jaynic.); finally Gateway 14 is one of three tax/customs sites comprising Suffolk County Council’s joint bid for Freeport status for Felixstowe/Harwich ports, if this bid is successful then Gateway 14 would function as a customs or tax free zone.

National Grid's Network Options Assessments (NOA) issued in January 2021 identifies significant onshore infrastructure requirements to support the Government's new energy target of 40GW from offshore wind by 2030. This includes proposals for two new 400KV overhead lines, one between Norwich and Bramford, and another between Bramford and Tilbury (including Twinstead). New substations and other infrastructure are also needed. A marine cable is a possible option to reduce pressure for the new overhead cables, however the decision on transmission remains live.

Climate and Biodiversity Actions – During the past year Mid Suffolk and Babergh cabinets approved details of plans to action the commitments to Carbon Net Zero by 2030 and to enhance Biodiversity within the districts. The highest 'carbon equivalent' emitters in the Districts are waste collection vehicles and leisure centres, given these priorities the Districts have committed to switching fleets from diesel to hydro-treated vegetable oil thus reducing emissions by 90% (anticipated switch summer 2021), and planning to install solar car ports, EV charge points and ground source heat pumps at leisure centres. For biodiversity the Districts are mapping habitat in partnership with Suffolk Wildlife Trust, undertaking a canopy survey and promoting tree and hedge planting and wildflower meadows. Other plans are also underway too numerous to mention here.

Plans for a visitor centre and café at Needham Market Lakes progressed over the past year with successful procurement of a builder, the new centre is planned to open in late summer 2021.

The Council at its March meeting approved a motion to review its public open spaces so that access for exercise and recreation can be optimised and health and wellbeing benefits best enjoyed.

Community Infrastructure Levy – Over the past 12 months over £3.26 million has been awarded to 35 projects across the Districts, with £2.24 million going to Mid Suffolk. This includes improvements to primary schools, health facilities (including Botesdale Health Centre), and a new emergency services hub in Stowmarket. CIL funds continue to provide a valuable way to fund local infrastructure and support growth.

Looking Forward – At time of writing, it is likely that formal Council meetings will resume at Endeavour House in May, pending any late Government decision to extend relevant Coronavirus restrictions. Informal virtual meetings and home working are likely to continue during what may be a long transition and recovery period.

Funding from the [Suffolk Inclusive Growth Investment Fund \(SIGIF\)](#), means that plans to expand the successful Virtual High Street pilot in Sudbury can be expanded to include other towns in Mid Suffolk such as Eye and Needham Market, and possibly others. There are many support initiatives for both businesses and individuals to use. While the pandemic restrictions remain in place the District must operate under somewhat limited conditions, these are explained in the Covid-19 website link:

<https://www.babergh.gov.uk/features/our-covid-19-response/>

If you have questions about this report or need help of any kind please do not hesitate to contact me by email or telephone.

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