

Annual Report for the MSDC Hoxne & Worlingworth Ward from Cllr Matthew Hicks

MSDC have formally adopted their Joint Local

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have formally adopted their Joint Local Plan – the blueprint for the districts’ future development until 2037 – providing clarity for communities and developers. A Local Plan is prepared by a local planning authority and includes policies to tackle key social, economic and environmental issues – providing a framework to guide future planning decisions. Mid Suffolk’s Joint Local Plan (JLP) has been designed to ensure residents and communities have sufficient housing, employment and inward investment, environment and heritage is protected, and the infrastructure is in place for healthy communities and thriving towns. Work on the JLP began in 2016, going through several iterations and extensive consultation – incorporating feedback from thousands of community responses during its development. This allowed the first phase of the plan to go before councillors at Mid Suffolk District Council’s meeting for formal adoption. The adoption of this Joint Local Plan is a significant milestone that enables the district to agree an up-to-date planning framework to guide development and sustainable growth to 2037. It provides a set of strategic and local development management policies which will be used to inform decisions on planning applications and will help us to reassert a plan-based approach to future development in Mid Suffolk. All documentation involved in the JLP process, including the Planning Inspectorate report, is available on the councils’ website www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/jointlocalplan.

MSDC agreed a 2% increase in Council Tax

The new Green administration in their budget agreed a 2% increase to its share of the Council Tax bill for 2024/25. Other increases include Dog bins up 22.5% and litter bins up 23.3% . MSDC have also put Council house rents up 7.7% and HRA garage rents up 8.9% and sheltered housing service charges up 18.0% on average. They also put sheltered housing utilities up 44.0% and also voted to put up the collection of bulky items (up to 5 items) - by 20.2%. I spoke and voted against these increases especially with regards to the increase on sheltered housing due to the impact on those most in need.

Town and parish councils in Babergh and Mid Suffolk will receive more than £1.3 million in developer contributions

Suffolk District Councils will see £1,355,329 distributed between 67 town and parish councils across the districts. Of this, £1,028,795.56 will be allocated to 40 town and parish councils in Mid Suffolk. Town and parish councils can then decide how to spend this money to best support the development of their local area and meets the needs of its community. CIL payments are a legal requirement paid by developers building houses across the districts. These funds are then reinvested by the councils into the communities, helping local infrastructure to develop at the same rate as housing. A proportion of this funding is paid directly to town and parish councils, with a higher amount going to those with successfully adopted Neighbourhood Plans. With the increase in housing in our local areas, it is really important that supporting infrastructure is able to grow at the same pace and it is through funds such as CIL, that we can enable this crucial grassroot investment in our communities. Through CIL funding, the council is able to provide financial support to the towns and villages within our district that have seen the most housing growth. It is vital that those communities receive the help they need to fund additional facilities and infrastructure to meet demand. Further information about how CIL works can be found on the council’s website, with details about how the levy has been allocated available on the councils’ Developers Contribution Database.

More than 1,500 households at risk of homelessness

More than 1,500 households at risk of homelessness have been helped to keep a roof over their heads by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils since 2019. The figures form part of a report spelling out how the councils intend to further step up their commitment to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping across the districts as the nationwide cost-of-living crisis continues to take its toll. The councils' joint homelessness reduction and rough sleeping strategy has been reviewed to ensure it reflects the current challenges facing the districts. The councils' housing solutions service is facing increasing demand, not only from tenants struggling to pay the bills, but also those looking for help because their private landlords is selling up, putting a further squeeze on available housing in the area. The report shows how during 2022/23 in Mid Suffolk, the number of applications rose to 588 compared to 510. Not all applications result in council help being required, but each requires further investigation and urgent support for those most in need. In fact, between April 2019 and March 2023, the councils stepped to urgently rehouse 247 in Mid Suffolk who would otherwise have found themselves on the street. The figures also show that in addition to supporting those requiring urgent help, the councils are working hard behind the scenes to support residents before they reach crisis point. Between April 2019 and March 2023 the team prevented homelessness in 553 cases in Mid Suffolk, with the councils' early intervention team offering advice and practical help to tackle financial issues, and supporting those affected by domestic abuse.

Although rough sleeping less of an issue for the rural districts, the strategy describes how contact is currently made with anyone found to be sleeping on the streets within 24 hours of a referral being received with outreach support, and the specialist bedspaces and wrap-around services provided to help them get back into accommodation and work. The strategy commits to further work in these areas, as well as providing further support to those in temporary accommodation – particularly children; pledges further work to help those facing financial hardship as part of the councils' cost-of-living action plan; and the expansion of Central Suffolk Lettings – the council's trailblazing lettings service. By providing landlords with a free lettings service and guaranteed rent payments, the councils have opened up the private rented sector to those in need and reduced demands on temporary accommodation or the need to use B&Bs or hostels

Work to make council homes warmer and bring down energy bills

Babergh and Mid Suffolk received a £1.6m boost in government funding 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.

Secretary of State for Energy Security Claire Coutinho announced that Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils would be receiving £1,593,000 as part of the latest round of awards from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. 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. Together with our Cosy Homes initiative which supports energy efficiency in the private sector, we are committed to making a practical difference to climate change in our district, as well as to the lives of our tenants. 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. Meanwhile, [Warm Homes Suffolk](#) offers grants for energy efficiency measures to private homeowners and landlords whose gross income is under £36,000. For those in Mid Suffolk, there is also the [Cosy Homes initiative](#) tailored for households with an income of less than £60,000 and less than £16,000 in savings. Find out more information on the councils' websites.

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