

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S 2021/22 REPORT FOR PALGRAVE'S ANNUAL PARISH MEETING



Health of the Organisation



Reducing our workspace

at Endeavour House to save **£675,000** over 5 years.

Over 3,450

YouTube views of Committee meetings.



12 new affordable homes
delivered in Green Road Woolpit



For Council of the Year

In 2021, Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils were shortlisted for iESE Council of The Year at the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards and won a bronze award.

Our new Outcomes Framework has **18 long-term** and **66 short-term** outcomes aligned to our **6 strategic priorities**



In November 2021, Mid Suffolk's Cabinet approved an **additional £5.1 million** spend to move at pace on our priorities.



120 new spaces at the Woolpit Health Centre car park.



For many parishes, this year's Annual Parish Meeting is the first one to be held in-person since 2019. I now find myself wondering how to compile a single report covering Mid Suffolk's activities over the past three years – or, indeed, whether to even try. You may be relieved to hear I have reached the conclusion that not only would it be too daunting a task but also it would be too lengthy for anyone to want to look through, let alone listen to. So, what to do this year?

Mid Suffolk's present [CORPORATE PLAN](#) was adopted at a meeting of the Council in October 2019. Here is a link to [a listing of outputs in the Plan](#) that Mid Suffolk and its neighbour Babergh District Council were aiming for over the three years 2019/20 to 2022/23. Six of those outputs align with the Plan's **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**, which are **CUSTOMERS, COMMUNITIES, ECONOMY, WELLBEING, ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING**. The infographics on the following pages present some of the statistics that describe the scope and success in these priority areas over the first three quarters of the 2021/22 year.

These priorities correlate with six of the nine portfolios held by the councillors who make up Mid Suffolk's Cabinet. Each of those Cabinet members is identified on the relevant following page, sometimes with an extra bit of significant information related to their portfolio.



Customers



Residents can borrow 27 **4G iPads** on 3-week loans from Needham Market and Stowmarket libraries.

8 new members of staff started their NVQ training in business process engineering to **improve service delivery.**



*figures are for both Babergh and Mid Suffolk



We received nearly **128,000 calls** up to February 2022 and processed over **13,300 customer emails.**

Over 900 tenants responded to our digital survey, of which **100** needed our help to get online.



77% of customers rate our online forms 5/5.



We implemented chatbot and automated telephony with over **13.8k interactions.** This is being extended to include Council Tax and Billing for 2022.

We supported nearly **1,100 customers** at our customer access points.

311 residents called us as part of the Home But Not Alone service.

Our website is rated the second best in Suffolk for accessibility



Although the data-rich graphics are shown against a relevant portfolio, they do not form neat packages. There can be a lot of overlap between the different priorities and portfolios. Thus, the new visitor centre at Needham Lake is under Communities here but it could equally well have appeared under Environment; and the Housing Strategies are, unsurprisingly included here under Housing but they could have been in Planning.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION & IMPROVEMENT PORTFOLIO, held by Cabinet Member & Leader of the Council - Cllr Suzie Morley, Stonham Ward

Performance Reporting

Like any organisation a district council must operate a means of checking how well it is doing and how effective its practices are in achieving its objectives. Mid Suffolk publishes [quarterly performance reports](#) on its website towards the end of the following quarter. You can find reports that go back to the first quarter of 2019. From the first quarter of 2020 the format was changed to a more comprehensive, graphic style that is much more interesting to browse through. This is as good a way as any of getting a feel for the ongoing scale and scope of the Council's work in three-monthly bites.

As well as headline performance indicators, for each strategic priority, the main objectives are listed, and for each objective there is a summary of progress throughout the quarter and a description of the plans for the next quarter.



Nearly £400,000 worth of grants were given out to support communities in the first three-quarters of 2021/22.



We made **170** Locality Awards amounting to **£155k**



The East Anglian Festival Network voted our Prima Donna Festival at MEAL Stowmarket the best festival in Suffolk.

1,880 residents contributed their views to the developing Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

A Mid Suffolk **youth steering group** was established with Year 10 pupils to inform our decision-making.



We allocated nearly **£96,300** in **Community Restart Funding**.



19 voluntary and community sector organisations were supported through revenue grants.

Over 100,000 spectators for the Women's Tour through our districts



COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO

Cabinet Member - Cllr Julie Flatman, Stradbroke & Laxfield Ward

The new Needham Lake Visitor Centre

[Needham Lake](#) is a popular countryside attraction, owned and managed by MSDC. Just outside Needham Market, it has always ranked highly among Visit England's most-visited free attractions in the UK. Part of the site is a Local Nature Reserve – with wetland areas, meadows and a small woodland.

The decision to build a new café and visitor centre was made in March 2019. A key milestone was a public engagement event in October 2019, which showcased the new designs for the centre. Over 100 visitors attended the event and there was widely held support for the proposals. Part of the feedback highlighted the need for a Changing Places toilet as some visitors would be unable to stay for as long as they would like at the site due to the lack of facilities. The scheme was granted planning consent in December 2019.

In October last year the public was asked to pick their favourite name for the new café and visitor centre from a shortlist of three. The one that came out on top was '[Duck and Teapot](#)'. The café will offer a range of food and refreshments, while the visitor centre will be a flexible community event space. The facility will be managed by the team behind 'Cabbages and Kings', the popular café at The Mix in Stowmarket

The official opening will be on 15 May 2022.



Economy



194 young people attended the 4-day long Careeriosity event focusing on STEM and Cultural Industries.

We helped
2,296
businesses in
Mid Suffolk with
COVID business
grants of
£42m.



The Public Sector Transformation Awards

We won an **IESE Gold Award** for Public Sector Transformation for our **Virtual High Street project** connecting shoppers with 145 high street businesses in our main towns.

As part of that, by December 2021, over **800 local businesses** had received digital skills training from Menta.



1,600 businesses are members of our Innovation Network.

Gateway 14 in Stowmarket secured planning consent; and is 1 of 8 Freeports in the UK (as part of Freeport East).



238 visitors from across the community and local businesses attended the two-day **Local Energy Showcase** in October.

We used the **Welcome Back Fund**, to deliver **30 events** across both our Districts with **5,670 participants** including **1,340** under age 12. We also introduced **six new walking trails** and provided **27 parishes** in Mid Suffolk with litter pick packs.



Gateway 14 attracts 'strong interest'



ECONOMIC GROWTH PORTFOLIO

**Cabinet Member - Cllr Gerard Brewster,
Combs Ford Ward**

Gateway 14 (G14)

On the edge of Stowmarket, this commercial and industrial scheme was the fifth largest of its type in England to be given planning consent in 2021. It is being developed by Gateway 14 Ltd, which is owned by Mid Suffolk District Council and Jaynic, the company that will manage its development. It was granted consent for 2.45 million sq.ft of innovation, business and logistics floorspace. The business park will provide 156 acres of high-specification space for a wide range of uses.

G14 is part of Freeport East, a new low tax, low regulation zone that, along with the Felixstowe and Harwich ports, hopes to create up to 13,500 jobs for the area over 10 years, with 3,000 jobs at the Stowmarket site alone.

Designed to meet both present and future needs, the scheme will feature 25 acres of high-quality landscaping with amenity areas and an enhanced biodiversity zone, to retain the site's thriving ecology. This attractive and healthy working environment includes footpaths, cycling and fitness opportunities for employees. A number of local lifestyle services are situated nearby, all of which will benefit not only the G14 occupants but also the surrounding community.

Check out [this link](#) for the latest news on the ground-breaking ceremony that took place on 25 April this year, and for more information [visit Gateway 14's website](#).



We have nearly **18,000** garden waste subscribers.

Switched our waste fleet to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil, cutting our fleet emissions by 90% and the council's CO₂ by 25%.



480 compost bags given away at our community event in Needham Market.



Nearly **45%** of our household waste is sent for reuse, recycling, or composting.



263 trees were given to celebrate births in 2021.

604 solar panels installed across Stowmarket and Stradbroke leisure centres generating 235.6kW



Secured funding to plant **3,000 trees** including at Needham Lake, and Greens Meadow in Stowmarket.



Installing 70 solar carports at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in Stowmarket



2 new locations have **electric vehicle Charge Points**, we are now securing funding for **21 more locations** over the next 2 years.

99% of all fly tipping incidents were cleared within 48 hrs.



3 acres of land acquired at Wash Lane Great Finborough to support biodiversity.



224 trees and **2,645 hedgerow plants** delivered to parishes through the Tree and Hedgerow planting scheme.



ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO

Cabinet Member - Cllr Jessica Fleming, Rickinghall Ward

As well as the climate and biodiversity action plans shown in the graphic, other achievements and events included:

- Our first annual [Climate Change and Biodiversity](#) report was published in March, along with a [Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report](#) (see also [this press release](#));
- An Energy Showcase (the second item in [this link](#)) was held at Wherstead Park, Ipswich to exchange information and ideas about low-energy technology and projects such as community heating;
- We contributed to Suffolk Wildlife Trust's assessment of local wildlife sites and corridors, which was completed this year.
- A Tree Canopy Survey was completed which will inform our future biodiversity strategy
- A Design Guide for council housing was prepared to improve building energy efficiency;
- We continued installing solar panels on council housing; over 3,000 Mid Suffolk properties now have them.

See also [this link](#) on our website for a listing of some of the key areas of the Council's environmental commitments.



Housing

Babergh & Mid Suffolk housing solutions team was **highly commended** at the 2021 MJ awards for their work with communities.



3312 council homes in Mid Suffolk had solar panels installed up to December 2021.

10 air source heat pumps were installed in council stock at Stradbroke, Framsdon, Tostock, Worlingham, Occold, Walsham le Willows and Stowmarket

Nearly **3,800 tenants** receive 'My Home Email Bulletin' giving them information on repair services, fire safety, and damp and mould prevention.



108 housing specific planning applications were approved by December 2021, delivering **926 new homes**.



Land purchased at De Saumarez Drive Barham to deliver **20 affordable and market homes** through Mid Suffolk Growth.



70 tenants took part in 'Sounding Board' engagement activities helping to develop housing policy over Summer 2021.



15 affordable homes were built or acquired by Mid Suffolk District Council between April and December 2021

97 residents with disabilities were supported with minor adaptations in their homes and 7 with major works.



109 residents were prevented from becoming homeless between April and December 2021.



£403k across both districts awarded via the **Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding**, providing **16 dedicated beds** for rough sleepers.

3 new council homes were built on the former HQ site and **5 new market homes**.



HOUSING PORTFOLIO

Cabinet Member - Cllr Lavinia Hadingham,
Fressingfield Ward

The joint Housing strategies

In March 2019, Babergh and Mid Suffolk councils adopted a [Joint Homes and Housing Strategy](#), setting out their vision 'for residents to live in affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.'

At the same time, alongside and as part of the Homes and Housing Strategy, the councils also adopted a [Joint Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy](#). Both strategies cover the period 2019 to 2024.

The Homes and Housing Strategy explains:

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils do not have a statutory obligation to produce a housing strategy, but to provide focus and show commitment to meeting the housing challenges ahead, have decided to produce one. The Strategy sets out how the changing housing needs of residents across both districts will be met over the next 25 years by the Councils, our partners, and key housing stakeholders.

The Strategy relates to housing in both the public and the private sectors.



Wellbeing



We are working with our **Clinical Commissioning Groups** and **8 schools** in Mid Suffolk on a two-year jointly funded project to address inactivity.



200 children & families

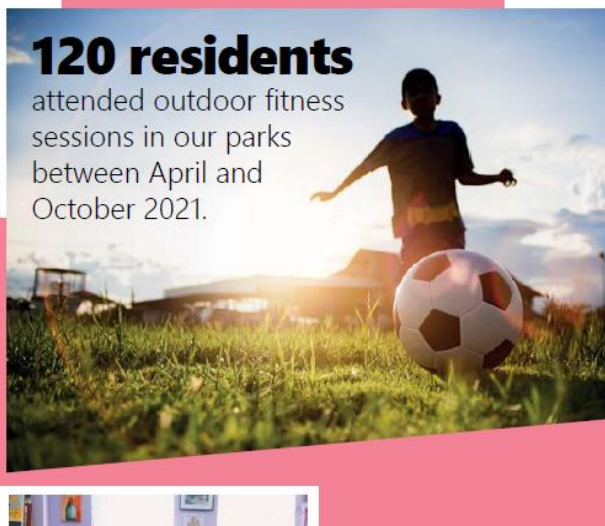
attended adventure days and family cooking schools during the school holidays at Stowmarket and Eye.

5 families

attended the weekly Chill, Chat and Play sessions held at Stowmarket and Needham Market.

120 residents

attended outdoor fitness sessions in our parks between April and October 2021.



28 residents improved their health through the Outreach programme with Active Suffolk in Eye. Half of these improved their mental health and reduced BMI.



9 schools took part in the 3-year Active School Programme, increasing active travel by **19.5%**



We provided **10 free activities** over Christmas for children eligible for free school meals.



35 residents

attended the final concert of the Sinfonia Viva Orchestra Dementia Music Project in Stowmarket.



HEALTH & WELLBEING PORTFOLIO

Cabinet Member - Cllr Harry Richardson, Thurston Ward

The new Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2027

The Councils already had a [Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy](#), which was updated in June 2021. It has certainly made an important contribution to the health of our communities but 'wellbeing' takes in more. It is about 'how we are doing' as individuals, within communities and society and how sustainable that is for the future. This view takes in not just health, but our opportunities, engagement and success in other areas of life including social, civic, economic and the built and natural environment.

In 2019 we decided to develop a dedicated wellbeing strategy and, after much hard work by officers and with input from two all-member workshops, the finished document received the Council's approval in September last year.

At the meeting Cllr Richardson, acknowledged the overlaps between our various strategic priorities and pointed out that the [Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2027](#) did not aim to duplicate the wellbeing aspects contained already within the economy, environment, communities and housing. However, these other strategies would be reviewed to ensure that wellbeing outcomes were being optimised and performance in those aspects would be included when reporting on performance in respect of wellbeing.

The portfolios held by the remaining three members of the Cabinet do not relate discretely to Mid Suffolk's strategic priorities. The simplest way of explaining their distinction is to consider them as supporting the other six that are presented on the preceding pages. Thus, they overlap with all the other portfolios and the way in which they contribute to achieving the strategic priorities.

FINANCE PORTFOLIO

Cabinet Member - Cllr John Whitehead, Claydon & Barham Ward

Funding to support the Strategic Priorities

The performance of virtually every enterprise relies heavily on the competence and dependability of its financial management. This is certainly true of a local authority and Mid Suffolk is fortunate in having a very good finance team and an equally good Finance portfolio holder. The careful management and prudent investment over several years have put the Council in the very fortunate position of being able to allocate a very significant portion of its reserves to a whole range of initiatives.

For a full listing of the approved £5.138 million allocation and how it will be distributed to serve the aims of four of Mid Suffolk's strategic priorities, see Agenda item 10 in the [Leader's Report to the Cabinet meeting on 1 November 2021](#).

ASSETS & INVESTMENTS PORTFOLIO

Cabinet Member - Cllr Peter Gould, Eye Ward

The recent performance of CIFCO, BMSDCs' property investment company

CIFCO Capital LTD was established in June 2017 with the sole purpose of investing in commercial property to generate a stable source of regular income for its ultimate owners – Babergh and Mid-Suffolk District Councils (BMSDC). This income is spent on providing services within each local authority area. CIFCO is designed to be just one of a range of sources of income for BMSDC in an era of decreased central government funding.

The company is funded by loans from BMSDC. It earns rental income from its commercial property portfolio and uses this to pay interest and capital on its loans. These loan payments are a source of income for each Council, after deducting their own cost of funds.

CIFCO was set up from the outset to deliver stable regular income while minimising risk. It does this by having a robust corporate governance structure, bringing in outside expertise to advise and act in CIFCO's best interests and having an investment strategy with well diversified portfolio targets.

CIFCO was initially provided with £50 million of capital to invest. As a result of the performance of CIFCO to date, both Councils approved a further £50 million in capital for CIFCO. Once that second tranche is invested it is not expected that the Councils will invest further capital in CIFCO. However, CIFCO will then continue to generate stable income for the two councils to spend on local services while continuously optimising the portfolio.

The company's draft Business and Investment Plan 2021-22, shows that by April last year a little more than £91 million, net of transaction costs, had been invested in 21 properties. By now the full amount will have been invested but the transactions do not show in the latest business plan because they were not due to complete until after 31-Mar-21.

Since the company started in 2017 it has generated income of £8.3 million shared between the two councils.

For further information, including more statistics and details of the properties invested in, visit [the company's website](#) and [this page](#) on the Council's website.

PLANNING PORTFOLIO

Cabinet Member - Cllr David Burn, Palgrave Ward

The outcome so far of the Examination of the emerging Joint Local Plan

You will be aware that for several years the Council's Strategic Planning team has been preparing a new Joint Local Plan (JLP) to replace our existing planning policy documents; Mid Suffolk's date back to 1998 and in today's planning environment they are considered to be largely out of date, which affects the extent to which our policies can be applied when determining applications.

The Council meetings in November 2020 approved the final draft of the JLP and on 31 March 2021, the Babergh & Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan was formally submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for independent examination. For more details see the [submission page](#) on the Council's website.

Once we submit the plan it effectively becomes the Inspectors' process and plan until such time as they issue us with their final report. And the Inspectors organised for the hearing sessions in Autumn 2021. Time moves slowly – and sometimes quickly – with plan-making.

During the hearing sessions the plan came under considerable scrutiny – which is entirely normal. It has big implications for communities and there is a lot of money at stake for landowners and developers.

During the hearings, and afterwards, the Inspectors say where there are things that need to be modified. As you'll be aware the plan has to be both legally compliant and sound¹. The modifications required by the Inspectors are essentially things they perceive are necessary for the plan to be found sound. And they are their modifications. It's slightly complicated because they require us to draft them but then they check them, consider whether they think they satisfy what they asked for, then they consult on them. Again, slightly complicated because they require us to manage that consultation but the responses go to them to address, not us.

The first hearing session of the examination was held virtually on 21 July 2021. But the examination was then suspended pending to give the Inspectors time to assess the many representations that came in. The result of their deliberation was to suggest splitting the plan into two parts and completing the examination of Part 1, which requires less modification, before continuing with Part 2, which will take longer to finalise. Part 1 is essentially all the plan apart from the spatial distribution and the site allocations; they will follow in Part 2, alongside anything else we feel needs revisiting. Within Part 1, the Inspectors require most policies to be modified in some way, whether that's just the insertion or deletion of a word or something a bit more substantive.

¹ For an explanation of what this means, see paragraph 35 in the latest [National Planning Policy Framework \(July 2021\)](#)

So, the modifications are as required by the Inspector. They are not an opportunity for us to say 'we've changed our mind' – as I said earlier, it's the inspectors' plan at the moment. The work involved is substantial: the modifications need to be made and then go through sustainability appraisal and habitats regulations assessment to ensure they meet legal requirements. Following that they will have to go through further consultation. We must comply with the Inspectors' timetable here so we don't direct this – but from some discussion with the Inspectors, we anticipate that consultation starting around September. Then there is likely to be a further hearing, then the final report, then to Council for adoption.

With very good fortune we might be able to adopt Part 1 by the end of this year but, as mentioned earlier, we don't control the timetable. The Inspectors suggested the split into two parts in recognition of the fact that Part 1 would give us an up-to-date Local Plan – that can be used in the determination of planning applications – in a relatively short time, whereas the modifications process for Part 2 would take longer.

The Local Development Scheme is currently being updated to reflect this, and this will provide details of what each plan will cover, and the anticipated timetable for their production; it will be published later this year. In the meantime, the letter from the Inspectors ([document G09](#)) explains the rationale for dividing the plan into two parts and gives details of the scope of each part.

The Councils are currently working with our consultants and project partners to scope and progress the outstanding matters raised by the Inspectors during the examination so far, and the necessary main modifications. Further details of this work and timescales - including consultation periods - will be provided on our website in due course.

A retrospective summary of the Examination process, with links to supporting documents can be found on the [Joint Local Plan Examination homepage](#) on the Council's website.

Links to all documents relating to the JLP, including the Plan itself, Evidence Base and Hearings Documents are listed in the 35-page-long [Core Document Library](#).