



PUTTING MID SUFFOLK IN PERSPECTIVE

HIGHLIGHTS OF MID SUFFOLK'S YEAR 2013/14

Our vision is - "We will work to ensure that the economy, environment and communities of Mid Suffolk continue to thrive and achieve their full potential."

Introduction

In just over two years Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have successfully created joint delivery teams that serve both Councils. At the heart of our approach has been a shared strategic view at both political and managerial level. This has allowed us to both confidently and openly engage with staff, Councillors and other partners, in co-shaping what the Councils look like without losing the necessary focus on the specific individual authority needs, changes to the Government's funding and localism agendas.

Through this engagement we have set, for each council, an overall vision, focused priorities around the Economy and Environment, Housing and our Communities, and expected outcomes to be delivered against. The aim of this briefing note is to provide an 'at-a-glance' guide for residents, Councillors, staff and other interested parties on the main achievements underpinning Mid Suffolk's strategic priorities, during the last year. As such, it does not seek to be a comprehensive account but rather one which illustrates the progress made.

Economy and Environment

Our priority is to "Lead and shape the local economy by promoting and helping to deliver sustainable economic growth which is balanced with respect for wildlife, heritage and the natural and built environment."

Economic Development and Tourism – The Council has taken over the project management of major growth schemes such as Chilton Leys Stowmarket and Mill Lane Business Park Stowmarket. This has had a significant impact on enabling these major projects to move from concept to application. Projects have been with significant economic and employment outputs such as Great Blakenham Greenhouses and Progress Power, Eye.

Town Centre Partnerships have been supported in Stowmarket, Sudbury and Hadleigh gaining £20,000 of direct funding for them from Central Government.

We have also been working with Suffolk County Council and District partners on a bid for LEADER funding for Central Suffolk, up to £2m with branding of support for wool towns.

The new heart of Suffolk web site launched showcasing what the two districts tourism offer for visitors. The new site is on an up to date platform, is more interactive and enables our Tourist Information Centre team to readily input data live time. This will ensure the districts tourism offer is as accessible as possible to visitors.

We produced with Suffolk local authority partners the Suffolk Growth Strategy and Delivery Plan and a successful bid for Ipswich City deal, which both form integral parts of the Norfolk and Suffolk Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) bid to government for £400m, over next six years.

Community Led Planning, Heritage and Design – The Localism Act has seen parishes taking the opportunity to shape their environment. There are six stages in the process for finalising a Neighbourhood Plan; Mid Suffolk has one at stage 1 in Eye and four at stage 2 in Elmswell, Needham Market, Thurston and Mendlesham. Babergh and Mid Suffolk parishes were well represented at a recent Suffolk-wide Neighbourhood planning event held in Lavenham and there is growing interest in the community.

Financial support was received from English Heritage to safeguard the future of a significant C16 chimney within an important Grade II* listed building at Debenham. The assistance has enabled the necessary repairs to be successfully completed and thereby secure a long-term future for the building.

Development Management – It has been a busy year as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been brought into full effect and this can be seen in appeal and other decisions.

A number of Major applications have been considered during the year including: the first tranche of the Councils “Unity” homes redevelopment in Woolpit and Stowmarket, seventy bed care home at Cedars Park and Mendlesham Renewable Energy Project

Spatial Planning Policy – A new joint Members strategic planning policy work group has been established as a task and finish group completing its work by the end of March (2014). Its two main functions are to oversee the agreement of a future programme of planning policy related work (and deliverables) and future arrangements for Member involvement in planning policy related work.

The team has also led on the development of new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) systems for both districts. This is a very substantial area of new work involving a significant timeframe and is required as a result of planning system changes that bring about new ways of planning and delivering a whole range of infrastructure provision in future.

Licensing and Gambling – We have taken on the new function of Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 at very short notice from Central Government and absorbed the function, and supported local businesses during the transition. This new legislation

brings in a new suitability based licensing assessment, new offences and tougher powers for police and Local Authority officers and aims to tackle metal theft.

On-line registers are now complete for taxis – allowing the public and police to check whether a vehicle, driver or operator is licensed 24 hours a day 7 days a week whether in Babergh or Mid Suffolk.

Solar PV Programme – saving money and protecting the environment – In line with our commitment to the environment and finding ways to help residents combat rising energy bills, the Council will shortly be launching a programme of installing solar panels, free of charge, to approximately 2,000 Council homes.

We have already identified those homes where we expect solar PV can be installed, however a company will shortly be carrying out surveys to check each roof individually. The benefit to residents of solar PV is that their annual electricity bills could reduce by an average of £150 per year, depending upon usage of electricity during daylight hours.

Food and Safety – The national Food Hygiene Rating System was adopted as of the beginning of April 2013. This system gives consumers access to the rating of food businesses and allows them to make decisions on where they shop and eat that includes food safety. Ratings can be found on the FSA website at: <http://ratings.food.gov.uk/> this replaced the existing scores on the doors system.

National pilot project on reducing fly-tipping – A county wide DEFRA funded national pilot on fly tipping is underway. It has included creating new resources for landowners, businesses and householders promoting the ‘duty of care’ legal responsibility, producing a Youtube video, organising, delivering and promoting two “weeks of action” involving county-wide joint operations with Police, Trading Standards, VOSA and HMRC targeting illegal waste carriers (72 vehicles stopped this year), and producing a Magistrates’ briefing document. A county-wide ‘summit’ event is being organised for April.

Home Energy Efficiency – After securing further grant funding from central government, the Suffolk ‘Warm Homes Healthy People’ scheme <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/emergency-and-safety/community-safety/warm-homes-healthy-people-fund/> continued to run for a third year. Here eligible properties are supported for home energy efficiency measures, heating system repairs or replacements etc. So far twenty properties have been surveyed with installation under way.

Business Energy Efficiency – This scheme provides Energy Efficiency Advice and Audits small businesses in Mid Suffolk for energy and environmental efficiency and associated reduction in operating costs. Twenty-seven audits have been delivered so far. <http://www.greensuffolk.org/at-work/advice/business-advisor/> .

Suffolk Carbon Charter (www.greensuffolk.org/charter)

The Suffolk Carbon Charter is an accreditation recognising carbon reduction measures in Suffolk's small and medium businesses - i.e. those with fewer than 250 FTEs. It is an accessible and size-appropriate measure for businesses to assess and publicise their environmental management. The Charter was established jointly between Suffolk County Council and the Environment Agency. Nineteen businesses have been accredited in the period 1st April 2013 to date.

Suffolk Carbon Leaders (www.greensuffolk.org/scl)

A new support programme started January 2014 designed especially for medium size businesses (50-250 employees). It provides up to 4 days of expert consultancy, cost-free, to help businesses assess energy use and identify savings. Support includes access to finance and accreditations, as well as project implementation. Suffolk Carbon Leaders is delivered by Carbon Smart under contract to Suffolk County Council. Three businesses have received support through this programme in the period 1st January 2014 to date.

Waste Services – A new updated and more user friendly software system is being introduced in order to provide a more efficient service to our residents. This system will be more flexible, allow the team to record accurate collection data, missed collections, arrange for relevant reports to be produced and allow the contractor to re-organise rounds in order to make collections more efficient.

In addition, a new upgraded telephone system, will allow callers to leave messages, especially at busy times, over weekends and in times of bad weather, and also for the waste team to leave pre-recorded messages so that residents can get real time information to inform them of varying situations. The system will also enable residents to leave messages for 'call backs' over a 24hr period which will mean doing this when convenient to them rather than during the strict office opening times.

Residents can now use a Direct Debit payment system for garden service subscribers.

Building Control – There has been new legislation to contend with as the Conservation of Fuel and Power requirements have been increased to ensure all new building work is energy efficient. We have prepared seminars for all of the architects and agents that we regularly work with and will be extending this to colleagues and Council Members. We continue to carry out Energy Performance surveys both internally for the council housing stock and private housing.

Housing

Our priority is to “Ensure that there are enough good quality, environmentally efficient and cost effective homes with the appropriate tenures and in the right locations.”

Flexible tenancy arrangements – The Localism Act allows Councils to move away from offering secure tenancies for the lifetime of the tenant and grant fixed term (or flexible tenancies) instead. The Housing Board set up a special “task and finish”

group to consider this and it recommended to Strategy and Executive Committee's to adopt a Flexible Tenancy Scheme for new tenants which will start in June 2014. It has set the minimum period of the tenancy at five years. However, it will exempt tenants who move into sheltered accommodation and those with disabilities.

Changes to Succession Rights (for Secure Tenants) – The law now restricts the entitlement of an occupier to take over the deceased tenants' home to spouses and civil partners. This is a marked change from the present rules. We are however, able to grant what are known as discretionary rights should we choose to do so.

Officers canvassed opinion of our Tenant Bodies and the Housing Board and they have agreed three situations where it is reasonable to allow family members to succeed. This new succession policy will be introduced on 1 June 2014 along with a revised tenancy agreement for both Councils. These arrangements will be reviewed by the Housing Board after 12 months.

Addressing Tenancy Fraud – The Councils have now approved their new Social Housing Fraud Policy and are working alongside other social landlords to share best practice on fraud prevention. A total of three cases have been investigated since January 2013 and one home has been brought back into use.

Asset Management and viability assessments – A new Asset Management Group has developed key criteria against which to gauge the long term viability of property and assets (land, houses and garages). These include the construction of the home, the cost of returning it to the decent homes standard, its location and demand on the "housing list". In November, the two Councils agreed to dispose of six properties, valued at a total of £890,000. This money will be available to re-invest in the Councils' programme of housing development and acquisition.

Cluttered homes pilot – Every year, Mid Suffolk is faced with the cost and the challenge of dealing with a small number of tenants who do not maintain their homes to an acceptable standard. We know that these issues are complex and history tells us that it is unlikely to be successfully dealt with by housing staff alone. The Housing Board agreed to pilot a scheme with a specialist company, *Stepping Stones*, to find long term solution which avoid costly enforcement action and repair costs. Stepping Stones have supported six tenants across both districts and the initial assessment of the project is that it is having a very positive impact on this issue.

Financial inclusion – The aims of the project are to ensure that some of our most vulnerable tenants affected by welfare reform together with those who may just need some basic advice receive the support they need to be able to deal with the financial issues they face. Work is underway to support tenants who have been affected by the introduction of under-occupation measures through Welfare Reform legislation. The introduction of the Financial Inclusion Project and appointment of a Tenancy Support Officer will provide dedicated financial advice and support to assist our tenants gain the skills and confidence needed to manage their finances. In addition, a new Rent Collection Policy which will take account of the changes introduced by the Welfare Reform measures is in the pipeline.

Tenant Involvement – All tenants and leaseholders received the STAR survey at the beginning of February 2014. This is a satisfaction survey in which tenants can tell us how satisfied, or dissatisfied, they are with the Housing Services they receive.

Communities

Our priority is to “Encourage and support individuals and communities to be self-sufficient, strong, healthy and safe.”

Communication – As part of the Transformation Process at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, the councils qualified for a grant supporting community engagement and have used part of this money to fund a new Community Voice officer; the aim is both to inform the groups about the changes that are taking place in the Councils and also to bring back their feedback. The officer that has taken on this role is Duncan Merren (Duncan.Merren@midsuffolk.gov.uk)

Working with schools – In October 2013, as part of Local Democracy Week, we invited all the high schools in the districts to send some students to our offices. They observed a Planning Committee making a decision on a real case, then discussed the issues and how the decision was made by councillors. To summarise, there was an explanation of how to register to vote, the importance of voting, and how it is possible for young people to get involved at a local level.

Shared Revenues Partnership (SRP) – We have continued to work closely with the team at Ipswich and Babergh to develop the partnership to ensure that we can answer customer’s queries as quickly as possible. We are also working with the teams including the Department of Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus to ensure we have a joined up approach to helping Benefit / Rents and Council Tax customers.

The average time it takes to process a change of circumstances of customers claiming housing benefit and council tax has decreased to an average of 10.1 days for the period April to September 2013 from an average of 13 days in the equivalent period in 2012, thereby achieving the target of 11 days.

Mid Suffolk website – We have continued to develop our website to make it easier for residents to be able to access our services at all times of night and day. New forms have been introduced to streamline the processes and make it easier for them to tell us what we need to know in order to answer the questions or progress their needs. We are still operating two different sites whilst services review their processes, but would hope to move to a single back end site within the next 12 months.

Silver Sky workshop – At the end of November a workshop was held to consider the future housing needs of older people. Between 2010 and 2030 the number of people over sixty five is expected to increase by 50%, the number over eighty five is likely to rise by 80% and the number of people living with dementia will double. Initially prompted by discussions about our own sheltered housing the workshop brought nearly fifty people from different organisations and backgrounds together. A number of themes were developed in groups which will form part of a report on the day with proposals for developing ideas into action.

Locality working – New locality roles have been developed in the Council to support Members in their community leadership roles and to work with members to support communities, to help us become more intelligence-led, to understand the issues facing our diverse communities, to ‘facilitate’ projects, to ‘help things happen’ at the local level, as long as they contribute to your strategic priorities, and to provide information that helps us to secure developer contributions through the planning system.

Community Rights - The interest from communities in these new rights which were granted by the Localism Act has gathered pace over the last few months.

Community Rights include supporting Communities to develop their own Neighbourhood Plans which allow communities to:

- choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built
- have their say on what those new buildings should look like
- grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead

It also includes giving communities new powers to certain local public or privately owned buildings or land for recognition as being an asset of community value. We have used the recent Parish Liaison meetings to outline these and the other Community rights and plan over the next few months to publicise and develop guides which will help to support Communities with this complex piece of legislation.

Work to support schools – This will be delivered by the Suffolk Education Business Partnership, who are an organisation that work with schools and employers to offer supported work experience, employer ambassadors to deliver in schools, and a range of support and options around employability skills and opportunities for students. We invited all schools that provide 11 plus education to an event which was held on 3rd March in Hadleigh, including middle, upper, secondary, sixth form, private schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Other employment enabling work in development – We have started to develop a closer relationship with the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) to support their offer to unemployed people living in our districts. We are currently delivering a rolling programme of work experience opportunities for unemployed people, as well as working in partnership with them to deliver targeted training courses for people trying to access work in the childcare sector. We are about to pilot a training course that will support tenants to become self-employed, the course will be delivered by a local group called *Menta*, who specialise in this area who will then also be able to offer ongoing and continuous advice and support to the new businesses in the future.

We have also introduced *Realise Futures* (who are a Community Interest Company specialising in careers advice and employment training and development) to a vulnerable parents unit in Great Cornard where they will be delivering family learning but this will also link to the national careers advice support and adult learning that they can offer.

Parish Liaison Meetings – We have also held four Parish Liaison Meetings across the Districts where we discussed the financial challenges we face, the emerging ideas coming out from the transformation process and the Localism agenda. More

than fifty Parish Councillors and elected Members attended the Mid Suffolk meetings.

Safer Communities – External funding has been received to help us deliver a project called *Tainted Love*. Aimed at teenagers, Tainted Love raises awareness of teenage domestic violence within relationships. Initially, the project will be delivered to two schools in the district.

Both Council Domestic Violence Forums have also taken part in the national White Ribbon Campaign, which raises awareness of domestic abuse against women.

Troubled Families – Suffolk Family Focus is Suffolk's answer to the governments 'Troubled Families Programme'. Troubled families are those that have problems and cause problems to the community around them, putting high costs on the public sector.

The aim of this programme is to ensure the children in these families have the chance of a better life, and at the same time bring down the cost to the taxpayer. The aim is to:

- Get children back into school
- Reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour
- Put adults on a path back to work
- Reduce the high costs these families place on the public sector each year

We are now working as part of this programme to support a small number of families within the Mid Suffolk district as the evidence shows that a joined up way of working with colleagues from education, probation, police, youth offending and many other statutory services makes the approach to these issue much more effective.

Lullaby Project – Two Lullaby Concerts by the City of London Sinfonia were delivered at the John Peel Centre for Creative Arts in Stowmarket during October 2013. These concerts were specifically targeted at under 7's and their families, particularly aiming to reach people in dispersed rural communities and hard-to-reach areas. The concerts were enjoyed by 156 children and 158 adults.

A total of nine workshops were held at Robins Children's Centre / Bosmere Primary School (Needham Market), Stepping Stones – Stowmarket Opportunity Group and Wattisham Community Centre prior to the concerts. These sessions were attended by 54 children and 12 early years' practitioners. Each setting has received a specially made sound book as a resource to help practitioners and parents sustain music-making with their young children beyond the project.

Grant schemes – The Community grants issued to date during the current financial year have included Capital Grants in the sum of £152,000 and Minor Grants in the sum of £24,000. Some of the larger projects who have benefited from an offer of grant aid include:

- The refurbishment of outside/astro facility at Hartismere High School for community use
- A new community swimming pool in Debenham
- The refurbishment and enhancement of play area in Beyton

- New heating at Eye Town Hall
- The kitchen renovation at Norton Village Hall

Strategic Housing (Affordable Housing Programme) – 47 affordable homes have been completed (as at Quarter 3) since the start of the financial year 2013/14. Delays in recruitment to the Strategic Housing Team in 2013 affected progress with some schemes in Mid Suffolk and available resources have been targeted to progressing the Unity project.

Work on Mid Suffolk-owned housing sites are progressing at St Edmunds Road, Stowmarket (9 units), Oak Crescent, Eye (12 units) which is due to complete in April 14, Wilby (10 units), and Wyverstone (2 units). Other schemes are under development at Coddenham (2 schemes of 15 units in total), Stowmarket (28 units), Affordable housing schemes completed to date are Felsham, Drinkstone, Needham Market, Harleston and the Steele's Road regeneration scheme in Woolpit. Rural schemes with planning permission agreed - Rattlesden Passivhaus scheme. Tranche 1 of the Unity redevelopment programme will commence April 2014 in Haughley (8 units), Stowmarket (14 units) and Woolpit (25 units). Tranche 2 of the Unity redevelopment will be submitted for planning in June/July 2014.

Car Parks – Customers of Mid Suffolk District Council car parks in Stowmarket, are now able to pay for their parking by phone, app or online, using their credit or debit card. The service, called *RingGo*, has been rolled out in six council run car parks for an 18-month trial period as an alternative way for customers to pay for their parking. The service is available in the following car parks: Bury Street, Stowmarket, Iliffe Way, Stowmarket, Ipswich Street, Stowmarket, Meadow Centre, Stowmarket, Milton Road, Stowmarket and Union Street, Stowmarket.

Corporate

Customer Support – The CSD contract will end in June 2014. Plans are well in hand for joining the customer support teams for BDC and MSDC to ensure that the customer does not notice a drop in the service that we provide. The Contact Centre for both Councils will be working from the Corks Lane offices, whilst still maintaining a front facing service at Needham Market.

Corporate Compliments, Comments & Complaints – A new system has now been in operation since 1 April 2013. This means that we have been able to see the overall situation for both Councils, and for the first time been able to centrally record and have access to the information for the Council's, allowing services and Managers to use the information to amend service provision or procedures if necessary.

Committees – A new Committee Structure serving both BDC and MSDC which included Joint Scrutiny arrangements, was introduced in April 2013.