



Welcome to our joint newsletter. Our aim is to keep you informed about relevant council business across Babergh and Mid Suffolk and other information useful to your towns and parishes.

Contents:

Across Babergh & Mid Suffolk:

Liaison Meeting Follow-up: Strategic Housing	1
Liaison Meeting Follow-up: The Newsletter	2
Solar Panel Project Update	2
Reporting Empty Properties	3
Tourism Development in Babergh and Mid Suffolk	4
Christmas Waste Recycling	5
Grants of £20k available to help Council Tenants	6
Dementia Awareness in Your Community	7
Suffolk Walking Festival 2016: Leaders Wanted	8
Mid Suffolk District:	
Dog and Litter Bin Charges	8

We upload every issue of the newsletter to our website: if you would prefer to share the newsletter from there rather than as an email attachment, you can always find the latest edition online at:

<http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/home/town-and-parish-council-newsletter>

Or:

<http://www.babergh.gov.uk/home/town-and-parish-council-newsletter>

Liaison Meeting Follow-up: Strategic Housing

Thank you to all those Parish Councillors who took the opportunity to attend one of the liaison sessions at the beginning of November where the changing role of the joint Babergh and Mid Suffolk Strategic Housing Team was shared with you.

The lively workshop sessions at the end of the presentation asked you to;

- pose us questions about housing need and supply;
- offer suggestions for increasing the housing options for over 55s;
- How we could all work together more collaboratively.

Town & Parish Council Newsletter

These sessions yielded over 200 individual responses. We are working through these and we hope to issue a response over the next few weeks in the form of a short report and possibly an FAQ item to answer common questions.

If you had an individual query and let us know which Parish you represent, an individual response direct to your Parish Council will be with you shortly. As not all these responses directly concern Strategic Housing team work some of the individual requests are being sent to the relevant team to action.

If your Parish Council have any further questions or solutions to offer on the above topics please contact us at strategic.housing@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk

Liaison Meeting Follow-up: The Newsletter

Following our request for suggestions for this newsletter, both in the last issue and during the recent Town and Parish Council Liaison Meetings, we received many suggestions and welcome feedback.

While some minor changes have been made to the format of this newsletter as a result, we are still considering how we can best implement some of your suggestions. Thank you all for letting us know what you want from this newsletter: if you have any suggestions, at any time, you can get in touch with us at the email at the foot of this edition.

Solar Panel Project Update

As you may be aware, we have been installing solar PV panels on council houses in the two districts over the past 18 months, and we have now installed PV panels on 1575 properties. In order to achieve this, a contract was signed with Breyer Construction of Romford, running from the 16 June 2014 to the end of December this year. As we come towards the end of this contract, we wanted to take the chance to update you on what progress has been made since last year.

Firstly, whenever we look at installing PV panels on a property, a number of considerations are taken into account including:

- The orientation of the property
- Acceptance from UK Power Networks for connection to the Grid
- Asbestos and roof condition surveys of the property
- A defined Energy Performance Rating after installation
- Tenant acceptance to the installation
- The Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS)

There is also a monitoring and administrative process to be put in place after installation, which involves a mobile phone connection to our monitoring company Orsis. In addition they require information regarding meter numbers, meter readings etc. Each property has to be registered with Good Energy, who is the company

Town & Parish Council Newsletter

nominated to generate our Feed in Tariff (FiT) payments. Again, a further level of information is required, including EPC and MCS certification.

As of 31st October 2015, we have:

- Looked at potential installations to 2150 properties
- Completed installation at 1575 of these properties
- Found 55 properties at which we are currently working on installation
- Found 206 properties with roofs that are unsuitable for installation
- Had 71 tenants refuse installation
- Been unable to gain access to 49 properties
- Waiting for UK Power Networks approval for connecting 199 properties

The recent Government consultation document, which proposes cutting the Feed in Tariffs (FiT) by 87% for domestic installations, will not affect our contract provided we can complete our installations and registrations by the time the Government takes account of the consultation responses and takes action. The current prediction is that the FiT will be reduced sometime within the first three months of 2016. Following such a reduction, the Business Case for installations would no longer be viable.

Reporting Empty Properties

For the last 6 months our Private Sector Housing Team has focussed attention on properties which have been empty in excess of 2 years. These properties now have a 150% council tax charge.

We now know of all these empty properties (based on council tax records), we know which ones are being well maintained, and which have been left to blight the neighbourhood. We have prioritised those which we need to pursue and we are giving the owners a chance to carry out the necessary works before we take the enforcement action available to us. Attention is focussed on those properties causing a nuisance to their neighbours and those which are a wasted housing resource in central locations or areas of housing need.

We offer a Loan of up to £20k to assist owners in bringing a property back in to use. This loan is for essential work to remove any Category 1 hazards (under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System), to help the properties meet the Decent Homes Standard and upon completion of the works the property must be available for occupation (for sale, rental, or owner-occupation). This loan is repayable upon sale or transfer of the property.

There is currently a landlord grant available for 50% towards the eligible expense of providing an energy efficient and controllable heating system.

We are also making owners aware that we can put them in touch with RSLs or a charity, to provide affordable or supported housing (subject to need by these external organisations and the suitability of the property). This could be an interesting option for owners who do not wish to sell but are also reluctant to become a landlord.

Town & Parish Council Newsletter

A form is now available on both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council websites for residents to report empty properties. These reports could highlight properties (both residential and commercial) that the council is not yet aware of. If the property is not already known to us, following a report we will assess the nuisance the property is causing and contact the relevant person with advice on ways to bring the property back in to use.

You can find the form on our websites at:

<http://www.babergh.gov.uk/housing-and-homelessness/landlords-and-private-sector-housing/empty-homes/>

Or:

<http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/housing-and-homelessness/landlords-and-private-sector-housing/empty-homes/>

Tourism Development in Babergh and Mid Suffolk

An introduction by Tracey Brinkley, Tourism Development Officer

I started in the role of Tourism Development Officer in October this year, and have been busy getting to grips with understanding what is expected of me over the next 3 years! It is clearly going to be a very interesting and challenging role! I have been getting out and about meeting colleagues, partner organisations, neighbouring authorities and key businesses and local groups in order to understand the way that tourism development and promotion of our area has worked in the past, is working now and could work in future!

The starting point for the two councils is the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Visitor Destination Plan which was produced by AECOM in May this year. You can view the report which is in two parts on our websites, at:

Babergh: <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/business/economic-development/tourism-development-in-babergh-and-mid-suffolk/destination-management-organisations/>

Mid Suffolk: <http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/business/economic-development/tourism-development-in-babergh-and-mid-suffolk/destination-management-organisations/>

As part of this study, many local businesses and stakeholders worked with the consultants through surveys and stakeholder workshops, and we intend to engage further and in more detail with all interested parties to try and take forward the recommendations in the report.

The main focus of my role now is to help implement the Action Plan (Document 2) from the Report with the aim of achieving the Vision Statement which can be found on page 15 – no mean feat! In order to be successful in achieving these aims, I will need to engage and work in partnership with all stakeholders. Bring the right people together, and help make the connections to other partners and to understand the funding opportunities so these can be utilised. Long term, whatever is created needs

Town & Parish Council Newsletter

to be supported by those set to benefit from it, and most importantly sustainable so it can continue to function and finance itself into the future.

I would be really pleased to hear from anyone who is interested in being involved in the workshops or the creation of a Tourism Action Group in their area. You can contact me via tracey.brinkely@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk, or on 01449 724 637.

Invitations for the workshops, which will be held in the New Year, will be going out to local businesses and stakeholders in due course.

Christmas Waste Recycling

As usual, the festive calendar in late December and early January means that, due to the bank holidays, it has been necessary to amend the usual waste collection days across Mid Suffolk and Babergh.

Then, once the festive fun is over, residents across Babergh and Mid Suffolk are reminded that they can recycle their Christmas tree at a number of convenient collection points across both districts.

Residents can leave their real Christmas trees at any of the many drop-off points across the two districts. Once collected, the trees will be chipped and composted at a local composting facility to produce a soil conditioner for the benefit of other plants and trees in the future. Alternatively, for those residents who have a garden waste collection, real trees can be placed beside the brown bins for pick up during the whole of January.

You can find the collection schedule for the Christmas period, as well as the details of Christmas Tree Drop-Off points in your district online, at:

Mid Suffolk:

Collection Schedule:

<http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/UploadsMSDC/Environment/Waste-Delivery/MSDC-christmas-calendar.pdf>

Christmas Tree Drop-Off Points: <http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/christmas-tree-recycling/>

Babergh:

Collection Schedule: <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/assets/Uploads-BDC/Environment/Waste-Delivery/BDC-christmas-schedule.pdf>

Christmas Tree Drop-Off Points: <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/waste-services/christmas-tree-recycling/>

Town & Parish Council Newsletter

Grants of £20k available to help Council Tenants

Council tenants who want to buy their own homes are being urged to apply for £20k grants to help them onto the property ladder.

Both councils were successful in applying for funding from the Government's £84m Right-to-Buy Social Mobility Fund, which was launched earlier this year.

This two-year funding opportunity, called HomeOwn, is designed to help Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council tenants to move out of their existing rented accommodation and to buy a home that best suits their needs on the open market.

The scheme enables Babergh and Mid Suffolk to make one-off payments to council tenants, of up to £20,000, as a cash incentive to buy a house for the first time – freeing up a council house for someone else in the process.

Initially the scheme was offered to tenants living in one and two-bed-homes. It has now been opened up to all eligible tenants regardless of the size of their current property.

A maximum of ten tenants from each council area can use the grants but so far only one grant has been successfully applied for.

Former council tenants Andrea Brown and Samuel Bennett are the first tenants to take advantage of the scheme. They moved into their new home in Needham (not Needham Market), Norfolk, last month with their children Skye, seven and Lewi, four. Andrea said: "When we first started looking for a home to buy, we saw this bungalow and with the amount of mortgage we could borrow along with our savings we couldn't quite afford to buy the property.

"Then, luckily for us, about a week later we read in the local newspaper about the HomeOwn scheme and the grant enabled us to buy a home we could only dream about before.

"The application form was extremely easy to fill in and we received a quick decision from Babergh and Mid Suffolk allowing us to have our own home and to free up a council house for someone in need."

Cllr Nick Gowrley, Mid Suffolk District Council's Portfolio Holder for Housing, said: "These grants are a great opportunity for our council tenants to be in a really good position to buy their own home. We all know how difficult it is for people to actually get a foot on the housing ladder so any assistance we are able to offer is fantastic.

"Housing is a strategic priority for both councils. We need to free up council properties to help more people move off of the housing register so if you think may be able to do just that and eligible for one of these grants, then get in touch."

And Cllr Jennie Jenkins, Babergh's Portfolio Holder for Housing, added: "Both councils are delighted that our first family to take advantage of these grants have bought their house and are now enjoying family life in their new home.

Town & Parish Council Newsletter

“I am so pleased that we were successful in gaining this Government funding. Babergh and Mid Suffolk tenants can now have access to a choice of homes on the open market which they may otherwise have not been able to afford. Anyone who thinks they could take advantage of this offer should contact us immediately.”

To apply for the incentive, tenants will need to show that the purchase of a property on the open market will be a sustainable one, they must have a clear rent account for the past 12 months, be purchasing a property that meets their current housing needs (all of the household must move into the new property) and prove that they can re-pay a mortgage.

For further information on this scheme – and to check eligibility – please contact Paulina Malinowska, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils’ Home Ownership Officer, via: paulina.malinowska@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk or 01449 724753.

Dementia Action in Your Community

Would someone with dementia, or their carer, feel welcome in your community? Can you respond appropriately if you meet someone in the shop or street who appears confused or distressed; or if someone you’ve known for a long time starts behaving differently?

Five things you should know about dementia:

- It is not a natural part of growing old – not everyone who gets old will develop dementia; and people as young as 30 have been diagnosed with dementia.
- It is caused by a disease of the brain. The commonest disease is Alzheimer’s, but there are 100 different types of dementia
- It is not just about losing your memory – it can affect vision and perceptions, communicating and doing everyday tasks
- It is possible to live well with dementia – if you have supportive friends, family *and* community
- There is more to a person than the dementia – what does a person with dementia look like?

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils can help if you want to become more dementia aware. We are helping to set up Dementia Action Alliances in Hadleigh, Sudbury and Stowmarket; you can find additional details on our website:

<http://www.babergh.gov.uk/news-archive/hadleigh-first-town-in-south-suffolk-to-be-working-towards-creating-a-dementia-friendly-community/>

With support, people with dementia can, and do, take an active role in life. Even little things like clear signage for toilets in the village hall can help.

If you would like to find out what you can do, please contact Nigel Brett, via nigel.brett@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk or on 01449 724 643

Town & Parish Council Newsletter

Suffolk Walking Festival 2016: Walk Leaders Wanted

The Suffolk Walking Festival 2016 – running from 14 May to 5 June 2016 – will be running many walks, with many different themes. However, they are still looking for individuals or groups who may be interested in running walks, especially in five areas in Babergh and Mid Suffolk:

- Bildeston
- Debenham
- Hoxne
- Needham Market
- Woolpit

Anyone interested in leading a walk can get in touch with organiser Karina Coghlin via karina.coghlin@btinternet.com

Please let Ms Coghlin know of your interest before Christmas this year so the Festival's schedule can be completed.

If you are interesting in taking part, information on next year's walks will be available on the Festival's website around March 2016:

<http://www.suffolkwalkingfestival.co.uk/>

Mid Suffolk Dog and Litter Bin Charges

The price charged by Mid Suffolk District Council for the emptying of litter and dog bins will be increasing by £5 per bin from April 2016. This will bring the costs up to £30 per litter bin per annum and £35 per dog bin per annum.

Over the last few years we have been working to match the prices of bin emptying across Babergh and Mid Suffolk, and as a result this year the prices in Mid Suffolk will be increasing while Babergh prices – already higher than the current Mid Suffolk price – will be remaining the same. The price rise is in line with the policy approved by Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Environment Policy Panel in 2011.

For more details, please contact either:

Sarah Carter via sarah.carter@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk or 01449 724 946

Or:

Christine McSloy via christine.mcsloy@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk or 01449 724 948

Newsletter ideas

Town & Parish Council Newsletter

What topics would you like to see covered in future editions of the Town and Parish Council newsletter? Please let us know by emailing duncan.merren@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk