



TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

January 2014

Welcome to our joint newsletter. It is aimed at keeping all town and parish councils, across both Babergh and Mid Suffolk, informed about our plans to meet the financial, and other, challenges facing us.

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Babergh and Mid Suffolk: what we are doing and what we're not

We are aware that there may be still be some residual confusion among a minority of our communities as to what Babergh and Mid Suffolk are doing and not doing as a result of our integration and programme of improvement and change. Occasionally, the term 'merger by the backdoor' is used.

Therefore, we'd like to take the opportunity afforded by this newsletter to briefly remind our town and parish council colleagues what has been going on.

What we've done

Since May 2011, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have made considerable strides in transforming how we do business and as to what we think our business actually is, shaped by both the funding climate for councils and new models for local government to maximise positive outcomes through new ways of working.

We have:

- Successfully integrated our two workforces into one single pay line, serving both councils
- Re-oriented the roles and responsibilities of this single workforce into new operational delivery teams better able to work with partners such as town and parish councils to deliver positive outcomes for our communities
- Made significant sustainable savings to give us some extra financial headroom, the better to take advantage of tactical opportunities to deliver outcomes that support our joint priorities
- Maximised the political leadership role across both councils to give us a clear strategic direction and buy-in so that everything we do can effectively serve two sovereign councils

What we haven't done

Basically, we have not compromised the integrity of either Babergh or Mid Suffolk District Councils who remain two, separate and sovereign entities. **They have not been merged and there are absolutely no proposals from any source for merging them at any time in the future into one new single council.**

Evidence that the two councils remain separate and sovereign entities (served by one smaller integrated workforce) include:

- Two separate sets of councillors whose seats will be up for elections to the two separate councils in May 2015
- Two separate sets of committee and council meetings that make decisions (although 'joint' committees exist. For example, to scrutinise issues in common across the two districts)
 - Two separate budget setting and Council Tax setting processes. As can be seen below, the two councils are minded to take different approaches to the raising – or not - of their Council Tax levels

What we are doing in 2014/15?

We are now using the flexibilities in having a new single structure serving the two Councils to:

- Look at long-term options for the delivery of positive outcomes via a number of Transformation Enquiry Groups. These Groups are looking to work with our communities and town and parish councils to help shape their specific proposals
- Undertake a priority base budgeting exercise for 2014/15 aimed at ensuring the best use of our remaining resources so that they are targeted as much as possible on the Councils' priorities
- Develop specific budget and Council Tax options for each. At present, Babergh is minded to opt for a Council Tax freeze. Mid Suffolk, after two years of no increases and on the basis of current information available, is looking at possibly increasing Council Tax by 5p per week for a Band D equivalent property. However, no final decision will be taken until the Government announces the threshold beyond which any proposed increases would trigger a referendum.

Power to the Community - Localism in Action

Public House - The Case is Altered - has hopefully been saved from closure after a Babergh community group used The Localism Act to buy a pub freehold.

The group, known as Bentley Community Pub Limited, began the process of acquiring the pub last year and has now agreed, subject to contract, to acquire the building from Punch Taverns.

Back in June 2013, Bentley Community Pub Ltd approached Babergh District Council to have the pub listed as an 'Asset of Community Value'.

The nomination was made in line with the provisions of the Localism Act and accepted by Babergh. In accepting the nomination the property could not then be sold by the vendors before the community group was given the opportunity to buy it on the open market.

The listing of the pub as an Asset of Community Value did not provide the community group with any preferential rights in their negotiations with Punch Taverns. Likewise it did not compel the owners to sell the asset. It did however allow them some time to negotiate the eventual purchase.

Bentley Community Pub Limited is hoping to reopen the pub once the purchase is complete and the building has been refurbished.

The Localism Act allows community groups and unincorporated bodies to nominate a number of facilities as Assets of Community Value subject to the qualifying criteria.

If you are interested in finding out more about the steps involved please contact Tracey Brinkley, Communities Officer (Enabling) for Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils tracey.brinkley@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Do you know someone whose work in the community is invaluable? Nominate them!

Do you know someone that inspires others in your community? Someone that gets stuck in when the going gets tough and the tough get going? Then why not consider nominating them for Mid Suffolk's 2014 Community Achievement Awards.

Mid Suffolk District Council's Community Achievement awards started eight years ago and aims to give recognition and honour to those individuals and groups who strive to make a real difference in their communities to make them better places in which to live and work.

To be eligible, nominees must be living in the Mid Suffolk district, work in the local community on an unpaid or voluntary basis and be someone who the community feel should be recognised for their contribution.

This community work could come in any shape or form, from fundraising work, to campaigning for improved local services, or providing a long-term service to the community.

Nomination forms have already been sent to schools, parish and town councils, voluntary groups and charities and Mid Suffolk is urging anyone who knows someone who should be recognised for their achievements to quickly grab a form and nominate.

The winners will be honoured at the Ninth Mid Suffolk Community Achievement Awards Ceremony which will be held Thursday, 20th March, 2014, at The John Peel Centre for Creative Arts in Stowmarket, at 6pm.

The closing date for nominations is Friday 7th February 2014, more details can be found at www.midsuffolk.gov.uk.

Babergh Chairman's boost for local charities

Two Charities are now £6,500 better off thanks to the fundraising efforts of Babergh District Council's Chairman.

Cllr Nick Ridley has represented the Brook Ward for the last ten years and was reappointed in April 2013 as Chairman of Babergh District Council.

The Chairman's chosen charities are the East Anglia's Children's Hospices (EACH) at Treetops, Ipswich and St Nicholas Hospice, Bury St Edmunds. They will have the £6,500 split between them.

Cllr Ridley said: "Both organisations are prime examples of what dedicated volunteers and staff can inaugurate and support.

"Without both of these Charities the community would suffer; every single penny raised will help someone who genuinely needs it."

Cllr Ridley added: "Both Hospices do enormous good for the people of the district and were founded through the great efforts of several single-minded individuals and I am delighted to be able to support them with this money."

The money was raised as a result of the Chairman's Civic Reception held in July and an Advent Civic Service in December, and, as a trustee of the Lord Belstead Charitable Trust, Cllr Ridley had been able to top up the £750 for each Charity raised on his two events with a further £2,500 each from the Trust.

European Parliamentary Elections

Voting for the next European Parliament will take place on Thursday, 22nd May 2014.

The deadline for registering to vote is 6th May.

The deadline for applying for a postal vote is 7th May.

Application forms must have been received at the Council Offices by these dates. We will bring you more information and fuller details once they have been received from central Government.

Individual Electoral Registration

This change to the way that people register to vote starts on 10th June 2014.

From that date, electors will be able to register to vote online, and each individual will be responsible for their own registration.

Again, once more information is known on this, we will let you know.

Suffolk Fostering Service and Adoption Agency needs your help

There are currently around 750 children in care in Suffolk, the majority of these are in foster care, and placed with our own registered foster carers.

Suffolk wants all children in its care to have a permanent, safe home in which they will be loved, nurtured and thrive. For some this will be with members of their family, while for others the best option is for them will be to be adopted or be with a permanent fostering family.

People who foster/adopt may be:

- Any age over 21
- Married, single, divorced, or in civil partnership
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual
- Rent or own their home
- Disabled
- Of any ethnicity, race, religion or culture
- Already have children or not

We know that many people can be hesitant to come forward and take the next step to either foster or adopt, and need some encouragement or apply or reassurance that we will respond to them quickly and sensitively, and answer any initial queries that they may have.

Suffolk Fostering Service needs carers for all children of all ages, but is particularly interested in hearing from people able to care for sibling groups or children over the age of 11.

Foster carers receive ongoing and regular supervision, support and training and are part of the child care workforce.

Foster carers can provide care on a short-term basis whilst permanent plans are made for children to return home to birth family, to an adoptive family or another permanent foster family. Or they can provide care on a long-term or permanent basis where the child will be fully part of the carer's family for the remainder of their childhood and hopefully throughout their adult life. We also have more specialised schemes such as our MTFC Zipwire programmes for children over the age of 7 years who have more complex and challenging needs where we offer the carers structured support and a fee as recompense for the complexity of the task of caring for the children. Or our LINK service which supports children and young people with learning, physical or sensory disability, and their families by providing regular short breaks.

Contact the Fostering Service on: **0800 328 2148** or visit www.suffolkfostering.com

Suffolk Adoption Agency is currently looking for families particularly for brothers and sisters to grow up together in pairs or groups of three; children over three and disabled children of all ages. Support is available to adoptive families throughout childhood and beyond if needed. Building a family through adoption is rewarding, and is an opportunity to make a very significant difference to someone's life ... it can also be fun!

Contact the Adoption Agency on: **0800 389 9417** or visit www.suffolkadoption.com

What do you think?

We value the comments of our town and parish council colleagues on how we plan to meet the financial and other challenges facing us.

If your council has any comments about our plans then please email us – and we will reply as quickly as possible.

For Babergh workingtogether@babergh.gov.uk

For Mid Suffolk workingtogether@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Town and Parish Council Integration and Transformation Newsletter 9

Keeping you informed

Our councils have set aside a section on both our websites where town and parish councils as well as other key stakeholders can access information of particular relevance to them, including these newsletters.

These can be found at either:

www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/workingtogether/keypartnersarea

or:

www.babergh.gov.uk/babergh/KeyPartnersArea

Newsletter ideas

What do you want to see covered in the next newsletters?

We try hard to bring you as wide a selection of information as possible but there maybe some areas you are keen to know more about. Let us know by emailing emma.morton@babergh.gov.uk.