



TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

March 2013

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

Financial Outlook and Budget

There is some good news for residents in both districts regarding Babergh & Mid-Suffok's part of the Council Tax which will remain frozen for the next year, from April 2013.

The Councils have recognised that local people are experiencing tough times financially and having to tighten their belts. So they have decided to minimise the burden on hard-pressed households by keeping costs down.

The impact of continuing Government grant cuts has and will continue to be a major challenge for both Babergh and Mid Suffolk. Both Councils are facing reductions in general grant of nearly 45% or around £2m over the four years up to and including 2014/15 - much more than the Government's 'average' published figure nationally of 28%.

Some people may have heard or read that the 'spending power' of both councils has actually increased for 2013/14, by 0.3% for Babergh and 0.9% for Mid Suffolk. This, however, reflects the new approach to distributing business rates and New Homes Bonus and is based on certain Government assumptions, which is different to the money we get for paying for day to day services.

In reality, therefore, it is not good news for rural councils and we are looking at nearly a 20% further cut in core funding from the Government (before any additional business rates growth and the New Homes Bonus) over the next two years with more cuts to come - probably up to 2018.

Rural district councils have, once again, fared badly in bearing the brunt of Government funding cuts. However, following lobbying by both Councils, the Government has agreed to give us a little more in terms of a special 'efficiency' grant to recognise the extra cost of providing services in rural areas.

The grant reductions will continue to make the Councils' financial position very difficult and challenging. Although we have already made savings of nearly £9m across both councils over the last four years and are on target to deliver at least £2m a year savings from integrating staffing structures and service delivery, further significant savings will be needed.

In the short-term and for 2013/14, by finding yet further savings of £2.8m across both councils and reducing costs again next year, we are able to achieve a balanced budget for 2013/14 and freeze Council Tax, as we want to help our residents as much as possible in these difficult times.

In addition to the core Government funding, there is also additional money we are receiving from the New Homes Bonus and it is proposed that this should be used to support Growth, Economic Generation and our overall strategic priorities.

One other issue that has been very time consuming for us all has been the setting of Town and Parish Precepts for next year, with one eye on what the future might hold in terms of reducing Government grants and the potential 'capping' of local precepts linked to Council Tax Referendums. This has resulted in difficult choices for Towns and Parishes.

Both councils would like to express their sincere thanks to all clerks and Members of the various Town and Parish Councils for their understanding and co-operation over the last couple of months. We know this has been new and difficult for everyone to grasp and understand. We hope the Government will act in a more timely and clear way next year on the funding position and both councils will be pressing for that.

Neighbourhood Plans

A Neighbourhood Plan gives local people a chance to create a planning document to guide and shape development in their local area and ultimately influence what facilities are provided in the area.

Parish and Town Councils now have the power to take the lead on producing a Neighbourhood Plan, with assistance from Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils.

A Neighbourhood Plan can be used to:

- Choose where new homes, shops and offices should be built
- Have a say on what those new buildings should look like
- Influence the design and functionality of open spaces around where people live and
- Grant planning permission for the new buildings a community wants to see go ahead.

However, it cannot be used to stop development in an area but the Plan can be used to allocate land if required.

Neighbourhood plans will complement or work in tandem with the Councils' Core Strategy (the Council's key planning framework) but not replace it. Nor will they replace the Councils' Local Plan. However they will have to be used by developers when they submit planning applications.

Neighbourhood plans are likely to take up to two years to set up, as they need to be independently assessed and then agreed by a local referendum. At least 50 per cent of local people must also vote in their favour.

Cost implications

We forecast that each plan could cost between £17,000 and £63,000 to prepare. This will depend a lot on the size and aspiration of the plan

The Councils will be responsible for paying for the costs of holding the independent examination and the public referendum. Other costs will need to be met by the parish/town council or neighbourhood forum preparing the plan.

Anyone requiring further information or support should to contact either Jonathan Free (jonathan.free@midsuffolk.gov.uk) or Nick Ward (nick.ward@babergh.gov.uk)

Spring Clean 2013

We are calling upon local people to come forward and take part in one of our Spring Litter Picks. These are part of Suffolk County Council's "Creating the Greenest County" initiative which aims to respond to climate change and enhance the natural and historic environment.

Last year 51 parishes took part across Mid Suffolk and 25 in Babergh and this year jointly we already have 34 events registered.

We know it makes a real difference and makes Mid Suffolk and Babergh desirable places to live, work and visit.

To find out how we can support you, please give us a call or send an email:

Babergh contact – Daniel Whymark 01473 825707
daniel.whymark@babergh.gov.uk

Mid Suffolk contact - Sarah Carter 01449 724946
sarah.carter@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Community Engagement Programme – Babergh and Mid Suffolk

Thank you to all of you who provided us with information during our community engagement programme last summer and autumn. We received responses from over 560 individuals, town and parish councils, businesses and other organisations across the two districts. This programme was undertaken to ensure that we understood the needs, issues and aspirations of our community and how these could be realised in the context of our budget constraints and national policy. Information was gathered by means of online surveys, questionnaires, meetings and via special events in specific localities.

You might be interested to hear what we have been doing with this information. All your responses have been considered and the issues were fed into a series of workshops for Councillors held between September and November along with information from other sources. These resulted in the production of a draft vision and draft priorities for each council which were approved by Strategy and Council for Babergh and Executive Committee for Mid Suffolk.

Babergh's draft vision is: "To create an environment where individuals, families, communities and businesses can thrive and flourish."

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

Babergh's draft priorities emerged as:

1. Shape, influence and provide the leadership to enable growth whilst protecting and enhancing our environment.
2. Shape, influence and provide the leadership to achieve the right mix and supply of housing.
3. Shape, influence and provide the leadership to support and facilitate active, healthy and safe communities.

Mid-Suffolk's draft priorities emerged as:

1. Lead and shape the local economy by promoting and helping to deliver sustained economic growth which is balanced with respect for wildlife, heritage and the natural and built environment.
2. Ensure that there are enough good quality, environmentally efficient and cost effective homes with the appropriate tenures and in the right locations.
3. Encourage and support individuals and communities to be self sufficient, strong, healthy and safe.

Using the information provided, the Councillors also produced a list of desired outcomes – what the districts will look like if our aims are achieved. These are currently being refined and will be fed back to the community later in the year. Once we have agreed what we wish to achieve we will need to work on the 'how' which will include consideration of the suggestions, ideas and best practice you put forward. This will then determine how we allocate our limited resources and will be used in transforming the organisation to achieve the desired outcomes.

You also made comments on what you expected from council staff in terms of responsiveness and attitudes. Many of these comments have already been acted upon, all have been noted and we are working on bringing about the cultural changes required.

Community engagement was not a one-off exercise and we wish to continue the dialogue with our communities. If you have any comments, queries or suggestions relating to either Mid Suffolk or Babergh please contact us via the tellus@midsuffolk.gov.uk e-mail address.

May Elections

On 2 May 2013 there will be local government Elections, to elect Councillors to serve on Suffolk County Council for the next four years.

Polling stations will be open from 7.00am until 10.00pm.

All electors will be sent a poll card, which should arrive by 2 April, detailing the location of their polling station, or when to expect to receive their postal vote papers.

Any elector who has not registered to vote, or any elector who does not currently vote by post but wishes to do so, should complete and return a form as soon as possible. Completed forms must be received at the office by 17 April to be effective for this election. Forms are available on our websites, or from www.aboutmyvote.co.uk, or can be posted if requested by phone. Please call the appropriate council.

The names of the candidates will be available from 5 April and the results from 3 May.

More detail will be on the Babergh and Mid Suffolk websites – www.babergh.gov.uk/elections and www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/elections.

Housing Information Mornings

There will be a drop-in Housing Information Morning for people with disabilities. This is an opportunity to learn more about benefits advice, good news stories, assistive technology, housing advice, advocacy, care & support, and leisure.

The dates are as follows:

Wednesday 6 March, 10am – 12.30pm, at 1st Kesgrave Scout Group, Twelve Acre Approach, Kesgrave IP5 1JF

Saturday 16 March, 10am – 12.30pm, at Red Gables, Ipswich Road, Stowmarket, IP14 1BE

Thursday 21 March, 10am – 12.30pm, at Haverhill Arts Centre, Haverhill High Street, Haverhill, CB9 8AR

Further information available from kim.edwards@suffolk.gov.uk

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

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

Thanks for reading this.