



Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils

Recovery Plan 2022



Foreword

The last 2 years of living and working within a pandemic have been unprecedented with impacts on our communities and economy likely for some years to come. However, our response has also been like no other with thousands of volunteers helping the most vulnerable in their communities, businesses demonstrating their responsiveness to adapt to rapid change and strong partnerships emerging that will be the cornerstone of our recovery and beyond.

Changes to the way we shop, access services such as healthcare and travel are likely to stay and we must ensure the recovery in our places takes this into account and we seek opportunities from such change, promoting innovation and new technologies, encouraging other activities into our town centres and accelerating our efforts on climate change and active travel.

But in particular, we mustn't forget those most vulnerable in our society and the partnerships we have seen develop over the last 2 years to protect and support our communities must be supported to flourish and grow, enabling access to better broadband for all, creating opportunities for all to upskill and aspire and strengthening the links between wellbeing and economic growth.

This Plan is a snapshot in time and is written to evolve and take account of new opportunities which emerge as we focus on our key themes of; Connected and Sustainable, Innovative and Creative and Skilled and Successful Places for Growth. These strands also underpin our new emerging Economic Strategy and link to wider Suffolk and Local Enterprise Partnership Recovery Plans.

We are committed to delivering this Recovery Plan to build upon the strengths around our people and partnerships and around our vibrant, beautiful places which together create a strong economy with a bright future for all.



Cllr John Ward

Leader of Babergh District
Council



Cllr Suzie Morley

Leader of Mid Suffolk District
Council



Introduction

As we emerged from the coronavirus restrictions, we reviewed the impact on our Districts.

Whilst these impacts are significant, the pandemic has also highlighted opportunities for our economy, our businesses, and our communities. As District councils it is important for us to develop a pathway for recovery and support the foundations of growth at a local level.

However, it is also important that we play our part to support recovery at a regional and national level by working with national government, the Local Enterprise Partnership, neighbouring Councils and Business Associations, to share expertise, learning and resources to help build confidence, attract investment and support future business resilience and growth.

This Recovery Plan will evolve to meet our local needs and must be part of a network of wider recovery plans to include the Government's Build Back Better and Levelling Up agenda, the LEP's Economic Strategy due to be launched shortly and the Suffolk Growth Inclusive Growth Framework and our own District wide Corporate Strategies.

The Plan's focus is on building resilience and future growth in our business community but is closely entwined with our plans for improved health and wellbeing, community safety and community development and the skills and aspiration of our current and future workforce alongside a strong and growing emphasis on the quality of our Districts as places to live, work, learn and invest.





Our key towns through prolonged closures of our high streets and the businesses that occupy them, lack of footfall and inability to generate economic spend alongside rises in vacancy rates



The visitor economy bit: 10.5% of businesses in Babergh and 7.6% of businesses in Mid Suffolk are in the hospitality and leisure sector, employing over 5600 across both districts. These businesses have been particularly vulnerable to the covid lockdowns although summer 2021 provided an opportunity to bounce back.



Impacts on worklessness with particular concerns about young people entering work and over 50s and those who have been on long term furlough



Our sport, leisure and cultural industries - these sectors have experienced the longest periods of closure and still may require significant support to regain pre covid levels of economic activity.



Highest rises in Suffolk for universal credit claimants in Babergh and Mid Suffolk - places pressure on our communities with longer term impacts on health and wellbeing.

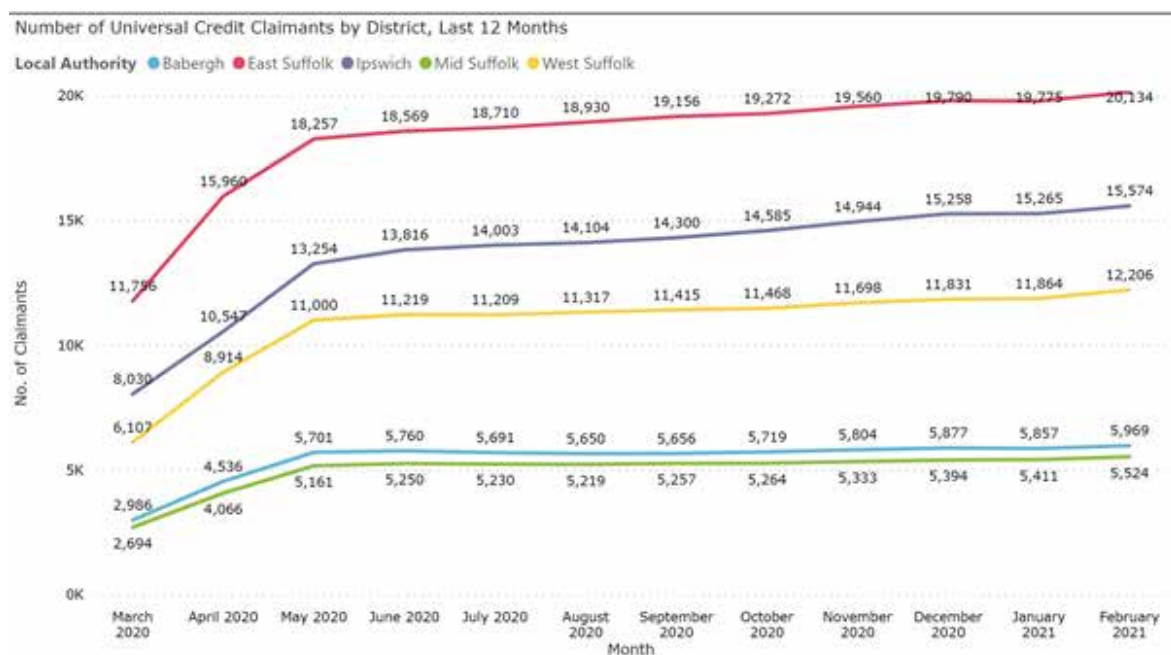


Global and local increases - we have seen price increase across all sectors and shortages in both goods and materials.



Shortages in supply chains and skilled labour - a combination of Covid and leaving the EU.

UC claimant rises for BMS from March 2020 to February 2021





So why do we need a Recovery Plan?

- **Give direction as we start to emerge from pandemic** – With competing priorities across the Council and within the wider economy, we want to make sure we are focusing our efforts on the areas which need the greatest intervention.
- **Helps to divert resources to where they are most needed** – To make sure our businesses and key economic sectors get the support where they most need it.
- **Gives us a better understanding of priorities compared to pre pandemic**
 - The last 2 years have brought about significant change in the economy and it is appropriate that we take stock to better understand and accelerate if appropriate, economic activity which stimulates recovery and wider growth eg digital infrastructure high priority now that many people working from home.
- **Drives conversations with partners** – the response to and recovery from the pandemic. Will require the public and private sectors to work together to find solutions to some of the ongoing challenges.
- **Helps to secure funding** – from a range of sources if we have a clear plan of support and a pipeline of projects. We believe our Recovery Plan with its clear priorities will enable us to be in a better position to articulate the areas and sectors requiring support through Levelling up.

Initial impacts and responses

The table below shows some of our initial thinking around changes resulting from the pandemic and reflects some of the impacts which have occurred or are likely to occur in the future:

People travel less often	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fewer vehicle miles – work from home – some negative impact on town centres but positive impact on the environment
People shift spending patterns/behaviour change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More Online learning• Less visitors/tourists• More online shopping• More digital entertainment from home• Less visits to town centres – more opportunities to shop local and trade local
Lifestyle/ community changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More online doctor consultations• More active become more active- less active become less active• More interest in climate issues• Issues with national care provision highlighted• Long term furlough highlights need to retrain and upskill
Impact on local, national and international supply chains	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delays to imported goods – more opportunity to innovate and develop local supply chains• Prospect of higher unemployment in key sectors• Some businesses closed for months will struggle to re open without longer term support

Emerging Economic strategy and links to recovery



Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils developed a new Economic Framework for delivery in 2020 based upon the themes of Innovation & Creative, Connected & Sustainable and Successful and Skilled.

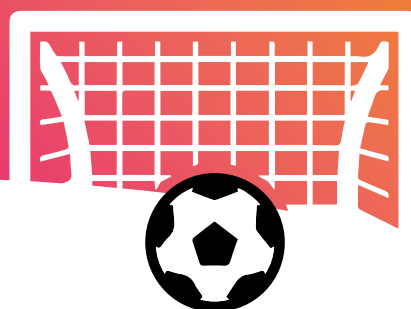
The Councils are also developing a refreshed Economic Evidence base which will take into account current known impacts from Covid 19 and other significant activities such as the withdrawal from the EU.

This new evidence base will lead to the development of a refreshed Economic Strategy from 2022 onwards. The new Strategy will absorb actions from the Recovery Plan but take a longer term view on economic interventions for the future.

The Recovery Plan links to a range of other Corporate documents and strategies which together provide a fresh direction to support our local communities, businesses and economies, helping to build resilience in our districts and development them to become places to live, work and visit. The Plan has particularly strong links to our Wellbeing Strategy as we are increasing work across teams and with partners to embed health and wellbeing into our economic activity.

Our vision for the Economy is:

We will become places known for strong growth in innovation and creativity, highly connected and sustainable with the best skilled workforce across the East.



Goals



Inclusive growth and support

working with our partners and cross council to deliver healthier outcomes in our economies as part of our joined up recovery programmes.



Strength in Innovation

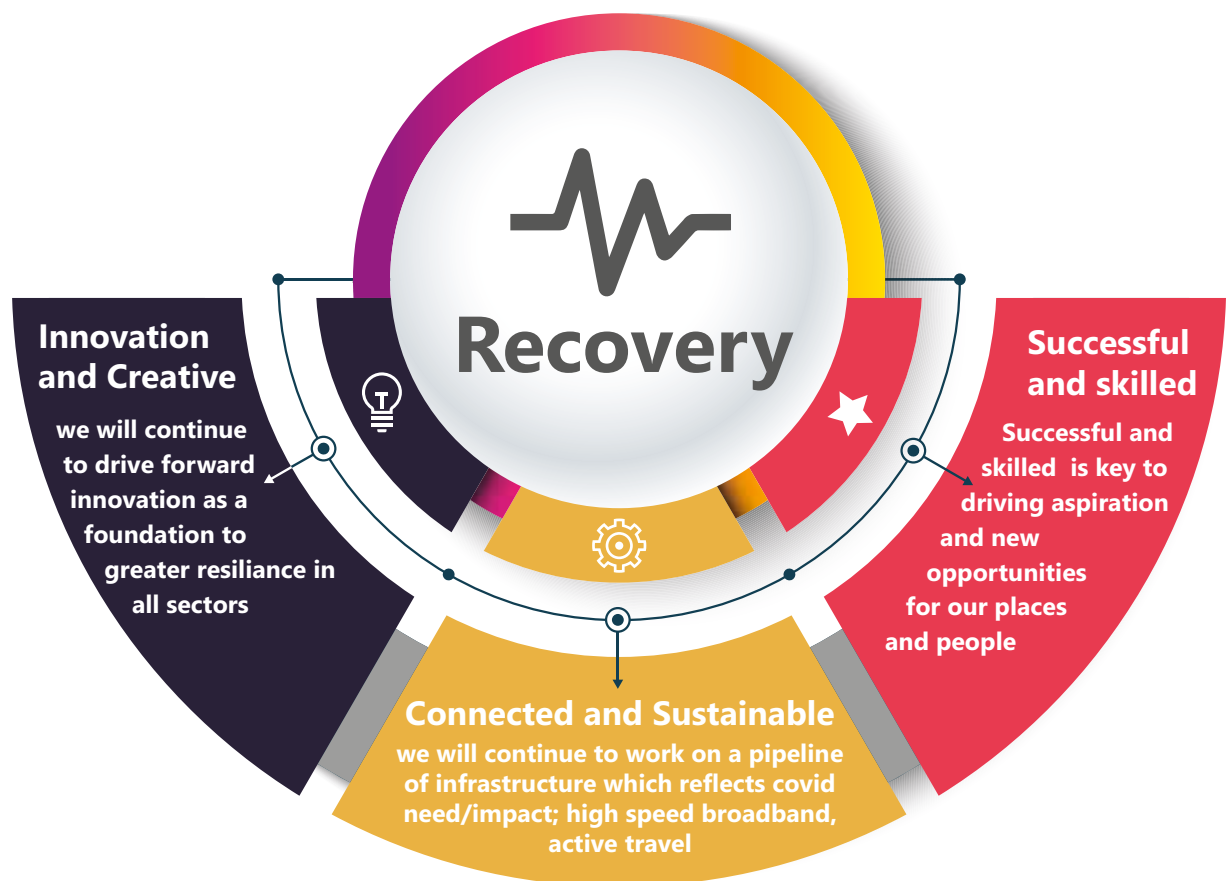
driving resilience and re growth of our places through innovation in sustainability and climate change and capitalise on the positive behaviour change from the pandemic



Resilience




ensure our businesses develop resilience for the future, enabling them to inspire and be aspirational within our communities

Three Priority Actions areas which reflect Government and regional policies and our own economic strategy framework.



Recovery Framework

The development of our recovery plan started with a review of some of the changes above and has developed to be centred upon the need to;

	REACT	Continue to administer the immediate support to businesses as we have done with partners since March 2020
	RECOVER	Work with our businesses to help them recover and work towards regaining their pre covid levels of activity
	RE-GROW	Inspire our businesses to grow and innovate and to build resilience for the future

Business overview and stats:

Within Suffolk, the highest increases of UC claimants were

97% in Mid Suffolk **95%** in Babergh

31% The highest take-up of furlough was in Babergh

Compared with 29% national average

Up to the end of June 2020, 97,400 employments had been furloughed across Suffolk

Up to the end of June 2020, a total of
29,200 claims

had been made under the self-employment income support scheme across Suffolk (72% of the eligible population compared with 75% nationally)

24,356 **16 - 64s** classed as unemployed by DWP
equates to 5.5% of Suffolk's total 16-64 population
up 28% since April

***Links to govt Build Back Better, LEP Renewal Plan
and Norfolk and Suffolk Unlimited Recovery Plan***

REACT



- We have been responsible for administering the government grants to over 9000 businesses across the districts.
- Made direct calls to our larger businesses to ensure they had the support they needed and acted as a link to government to feedback business concerns such as the initial slow processes of bounce back loans.
- Worked with the New Anglia Growth Hub to signpost businesses to its triage system which provided at least 1 hour free business support to each company.
- Supported the Virtual High Street platform in Sudbury to enable businesses to trade even when they had to close their doors.
- Ran the Innovation Awards in November 2020 to showcase the innovation and resilience across business in all sectors during the pandemic.
- Used a targeted programme of social media to promote support to businesses.
- Developed a programme of support through the Re opening High streets safely initiative to enable businesses to re-open their doors to customers.
- Worked with partners across Suffolk to launch a locally enhanced and supported version of the government Kickstart scheme. By the end of August 2021 there were 739 placements available from 210 employers. These are in addition to the wider Kickstart placements available across Suffolk.

RECOVER

Innovative and Creative Recovery

We will continue to expand our vision to promote Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts as places of innovation in the heart of the East of England.



We are now well underway with a new innovation network and board structure between the public and private sector, encouraging stronger communication and collaboration between partners.



Gateway 14 and our key towns programme continue to be a focus with plans to be accelerated for an Innovation cluster at Gateway 14 linked to the new Freeport East status, as Gateway 14 will be established as a tax site for the initiative



In all of our key towns cultural regeneration will be a key driver in the revival of our places, making the visitor experience more diverse and attractive.



We continue to innovate in our approach to business support, with the delivery of government support grant schemes and our own programme of grants for our SMEs.



Our award-winning, SIGIF funded, Virtual High Street programme (www.virtualhighstreet.uk) successfully launched in Sudbury will be rolled out to our remaining four market towns over the next year. We have also secured funding for a support package for our high street businesses to build their digital skills.



Refreshed focus on supporting start ups and the Innovate Local programme sees the development of new pop up innovation spaces for a range of businesses.

RECOVER

Skilled and Successful Recovery

Following on from the Innovation Awards in November 2020 we continue to help our businesses build confidence through celebrating their resilience and adaptability during covid.



We have seen amazing businesses grow and find new ways of working even in the hardest of times.



A new business led Innovation & Skills centre is being planned at Gateway14.

We have developed an Economies For Healthier Lives programme which could bring new opportunities to primary school children, adults who have been on long term furlough and support new fast growth entrepreneurs.



We are committed to raising aspiration in partnership with schools and the creation of a schools innovation programme.



Our newly formed cultural groups in both Sudbury and Stowmarket will collaborate to build our visitor economy offer and use culture as a way to drive people back into our town centres.




The Local Energy showcase event in Oct 2021 was a huge success in promoting, upskilling and inspiring our local businesses and communities to lower their carbon footprint.


RECOVER

Connected and Sustainable Recovery


We are supporting the transition of our Council services and assets to zero carbon and encouraging development of new technologies that will support a cleaner, greener economy alongside investment in walking, cycling and visitor economy projects




Sustainable Travel Officer appointed to deliver on active travel projects, create new walking and cycling trails and deliver projects linked to our zero carbon agenda.



Consultation undertaken for cycling and walking infrastructure improvements via "Commonplace" community engagement platform – largest response Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have ever seen to a consultation. Responses have informed the development of an emerging Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for the districts.




Solar car ports - contractor appointed and planning permission secured to facilitate delivery of the project and draw down £400k of investment from the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership.




Low carbon study for Gateway 14 completed and phase 2 works commissioned to explore options for creating an exemplar zero carbon development.



An Outline Business Case for Freeport East has been approved by Government along with three designated tax sites including Gateway 14 - which will deliver significant financial benefits to occupiers.



Onsite works commenced at Needham Lakes to create an environmentally friendly visitor centre.



Public sector decarbonisation project secured funding of £1.4m to improve the energy efficiency of key Council assets.

RE-GROW

Connected and Sustainable Regrowth

As we look to the future we are committed to developing plans for better connected infrastructure and more sustainable ways of delivering economic growth. We are committed to developing the infrastructure to support the new ways people want to work and live post Covid-19. Here's how:



We will be working with SCC and a range of private sector partners to explore ways to bring high speed but affordable gigabit broadband to our places.



With less reliance on private cars over the last two years, we will be working with partners such as Suffolk County Council and Transport East to develop new accessible and attractive walking and cycling routes through our Vision for Sustainable Travel and through our new Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan



To maximise and promote low carbon opportunities from the Freeport G14 site in Stowmarket, we will work with the developer to ensure all avenues are explored with new businesses at the site.



We'll continue to promote and develop supply chain networks within our energy businesses in the Districts.



RE-GROW

Innovative and Creative Regrowth

Innovation and creative thinking will continue to play a strong part of our emerging longer term economic strategy. The opportunities we have in both districts linked to innovation in sectors such as agriculture, energy and AI will continue to be a focus for us as we create new delivery plans for our Food Enterprise Zones, roll out new ways of working at our Business led skills centre on Gateway 14 and seek to host the biennial Innovation Awards in Suffolk.

We seek to inspire every young person in the district by developing pop-up hubs in every town centre.



We will build upon the strengths of our key towns to ensure they become places with compelling stories, drawing in visitors from near and far through the range of regionally and nationally significant cultural and heritage attractions. We will support these venues to become anchors in our high streets.



We will bring together innovators across sectors through our growing Innovation Network, creating learning and collaboration opportunities and promoting the development of cross sector pilots.



We will seek to bring innovation to our core sectors through better intelligence, more partnership working, particularly with our universities and through the Freeport East programme, and a stronger understanding of what works well in the districts.



RE-GROW

Skilled and Successful



We will continue to promote aspiration across the district in our places and will offer opportunities for all ages to gain stronger transferable skills through better partnership working with business and education



We will promote and learn from our successes, putting our places on the regional and national map through the wealth of innovative and high performing businesses we have in the districts.



We will continue to join national forums and round tables to be at the forefront of information and learning about how to stimulate growth and successfully defeat our challenges.



We are committed to working to create exciting new partnerships between our primary and secondary schools, HE and FE partners and local businesses to maximise opportunities for aspiration and improved skills to change the direction of our low wage economy and low skills base.

