

District Councillor Report

Crowcroft Road

I have received numerous complaints from residents in the road regarding the development that is being built in opposite Pykes Field. So far there has been complaints about mud on the road, flooding and now there are concerns that the width of Crowcroft Road has been reduced.

I have previously tried contacting the company, but they have so far failed to return emails or calls. I have spoken to the site manager who made promises that appear not to have been kept. I have also raised a case with planning enforcement who are trying to speak to the company.

Budget News

The current economic situation has put pressure on the Council to deliver a balanced budget this year. The net cost of delivering services is set to increase by almost 20% from £10.43m in 2022/3 to £12.45m in 2023/24, while the cost of running and maintaining the council's housing stock has already increased by 50%.

It was a difficult decision to agree to this year's budget because while the Council has been able to use savings and investments to balance the books, next year's budget will see a 2.99% increase to the district council's share of council tax - the equivalent of an extra £5.30 a year, or 10p a week for residents in a Band D property.

Council tenants will also see a 7% increase in rents to try to keep pace with increased costs and ensure necessary investment in repairs and maintenance across the council's social housing stock. This will mean average weekly social rent increasing by £6.68 a week from £95.47 to £102.15. For affordable housing, weekly rents would increase by £9.41 from £134.39 to £143.80.

Although the Council balanced the books this year, the outlook for the forthcoming years is much more challenging.

Housing

Following an in-depth review of the Councils' Building Services the Council have self-referred themselves to the regulator for social housing. A number of properties were found to be failing Health & Safety compliance.

Detailed investigations showed that some of homes were not compliant, and urgent action is being undertaken to resolve the issues.

In Babergh, of 3,502 properties

- 116 did not have an up-to-date electrical safety report.
- Seventy-two were overdue a gas safety inspection.
- Thirty-two were overdue asbestos re-inspection surveys.

A Regulatory Notice was issued for this breach of compliance. This means it will now monitor Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils and will meet with the Council regularly to ensure the necessary changes are made.

Also in housing, there are currently around 1000 homes across both districts sitting empty. To help bring these houses into use Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have introduced their Houses4Homes service, providing help and support for owners of properties that have been empty for six months or more.

Houses4Homes supports the councils' aim to reduce the number of long-term empty properties within the districts, by helping to bring them back into use and discourage owners from leaving them empty.

New Depot funding

The councils have also sought agreement to add £6m to each budget to start the search for a single depot. The plan is to close three aging sites and consolidate them into a single 8-acre site at a location close to the A14, for the councils' two hundred shared operational staff and fleet – including waste services, public realm, and building services and repairs teams.

Now the councils have approved funding, the next stage of the project will involve developing a more detailed business case.

Babergh Funding

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils have again been able to offer funding to community projects across the districts with money received from developers. More than £500,000 in funding was approved for the latest round of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) bids. 11 bids received support, including a 3G pitch for AFC Sudbury, an activity room and extension at Stutton Village Hall and a new play area in Capel St Mary.

May Elections

The May elections will be the first where voters will be required to produce photo ID at the polling station. Many forms of ID can be used and even out of date driving licences and passports will be accepted as long as the picture is clear. Alternatively residents can also apply to the council for photo ID or register for a postal votes which does not require ID.

The council will be supporting the Electoral Commission's 'Got 5?' campaign running through March and April to raise awareness of upcoming elections and drive voter registration. The Commission will be advertising across a combination of channels including TV, radio, posters, social media, website banners, cinema advertising, and Google search. Babergh and Mid Suffolk Council will also be sharing the messages through the council's social media channels and invite our towns and parishes to do the same.