

District Councillor Report for Bramford January 2024

Community Ownership Fund

The government is providing £150 million over 4 years to support community groups in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to take ownership of assets and amenities at risk of being lost, e.g. community centres, parks, pubs and post offices. (See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-ownership-fund-prospectus>).

Voluntary and community groups can bid for funding to acquire important assets and run them for the benefit of the community. The Fund will run until March 2025. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will run regular bidding windows throughout the year for applicants to submit a full application to the Fund.

Suffolk Recycling

Commencing April 26th, 2024, glass will be included in kerbside collections. Meanwhile, MSDC is actively promoting its "Glass is better in the bank" campaign, emphasizing that glass can be efficiently reprocessed in the UK, ready to be transformed into new bottles or jars within a few weeks. The recyclability of glass is limitless.

Foxhall Recycling Centre—its development is now finished and fully operational, completing the project ahead of schedule. The modifications to both highway and site layouts aim to enhance accessibility. Noteworthy improvements include the removal of steps leading to containers and the relocation of the Re-use Shop, contributing to an enhanced customer experience.

Living well in Winter

The 'Living Well in Winter' grant, introduced in 2023, has allocated over £36,000 to more than 30 community projects in Babergh and Mid Suffolk. The funding supports voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise organizations in creating warm spaces and activities to address social isolation during the winter. Successful projects, ranging from coffee mornings to skill development workshops, cater to various age groups. Babergh received £21,247 for 17 projects, while Mid Suffolk obtained £15,462.79 for 14 projects. The initiative aims to make a positive impact on communities, especially during the challenging cost-of-living crisis. Council members express gratitude to the local groups for their efforts in enhancing residents' well-being and fostering connections within the communities.

New Council Housing

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have provided a housing boost by adding 128 new affordable and high-quality council homes in the past year. Some of which involve collaboration with housing developers and the development of properties on

council-owned land. In 2023, 42 new homes were added in Babergh, and 86 in Mid Suffolk, bringing the total housing stock to nearly 7,000 homes in the region.

Bramford has provided 16 new affordable homes comprising 2 and 3-bedroom houses and Belway have built 3 two bedroom houses for shared ownership.

Scrutiny

Scrutiny will look for the second time at the budget position on the 22nd of January. The Council is facing an unprecedented financial challenge due to global events, rising inflation, and interest rates. Quarterly financial reports throughout the year have highlighted these challenges, expected to persist in 2024/25.

As of Quarter 2 in 2023/24, the General Fund faces an adverse variance of £700k to the budget. Despite this, the Council anticipates a surplus of just over £2.03m to transfer to reserves by year-end. Inflationary pressures, a reduction in planning income, higher interest costs, and reduced investment income contribute to the adverse variance. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) forecasts a deficit of £1.488m in Quarter 2, attributed to inflationary pressures and increased costs related to void and responsive repairs work.

Post-May 2023 elections, a Green administration has taken charge, emphasizing environmental sustainability and social justice in the new Mid Suffolk Plan. The budget for 2024/25 reflects this shift, aligning with known pressures, political priorities, and efficiency measures to avoid negative impacts on service delivery. Collaboration between the Finance Team, budget managers, and the Senior Leadership Team has updated the Council's budget requirements. Efforts focus on identifying efficiencies and savings while reinforcing the Council's commitment to social and environmental responsibility, citizen support, and community thriving.

Port One

On the 17th of January the planning committee will look at the major development at Port One in Lt Blakenham it is 3 warehouses over 31.05 ha and will bring the development nearer to Bramford down the B1113 filling into the greenhouses and create a new access before the Gt Blakenham traffic lights. There are proposed improvements to the roundabout at J52, I believe this will be discussed in the meeting.

Kind regards

Cllr James Caston