

District Councillor Report for Bramford June 2024

Councils' commercial property arm continues to outperform market

Babergh and Mid Suffolk's commercial property investment company, CIFCO Capital Ltd, generated over £1.26 million in net income last year, contributing to a total net income of more than £12 million since its establishment in 2017. The councils initially borrowed £99.2 million to invest in a diverse portfolio of 22 properties, which now houses 83 tenants. Despite a 2.58% decrease in portfolio value due to inflation and interest rate rises, CIFCO outperforms the market with rental arrears below 5% and vacancy rates at 3.4%, compared to the market average of 8.3%. Additionally, CIFCO is working towards environmental sustainability, with 50% of its properties currently holding an EPC rating of C or above, aiming for all properties to meet this standard by 2027.

Funding boost for Babergh and Mid Suffolk communities

Town and parish councils in Babergh and Mid Suffolk will receive over £1.2 million from developer contributions to enhance community infrastructure amid housing growth. This funding comes from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charged to developers and is redistributed to local councils. Mid Suffolk's 44 town and parish councils will share £592,000, while 20 councils in Babergh will receive £677,000. Councils with adopted Neighbourhood Plans receive higher amounts, allowing them to better address local development needs. This round of funding adds to the £14 million allocated for infrastructure projects since 2018. The latest bid round for future CIL funding is open until May 31, with decisions expected in Autumn 2024. Further details are available on the council's website.

Feel Good Suffolk helps over 2,000 people to improve their health and wellbeing

Feel Good Suffolk, launched in October 2023, has helped over 2,000 residents improve their health by offering support to quit smoking, manage weight, and increase physical activity. To date, approximately 730 people have received help to quit smoking, over 1,300 to manage weight, and more than 470 to become more active. Mid Suffolk resident Leah Wright benefited from the GP referral scheme and now regularly attends the gym. The service, developed in collaboration with Suffolk residents, aims to provide valued health and wellbeing support. The initiative is a partnership among Suffolk County Council, local district councils, and NHS organizations. More information is available on the Feel Good Suffolk website and social media.

Capital grant window reopens as £368k awarded in 23/24

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have reopened the capital grant application window, allowing community groups to apply for financial support for

projects up to £10,000. These grants can fund improvements and repairs to social infrastructure, such as village halls, play areas, and sports facilities. In the 2023/24 financial year, £367,803 was distributed, with £128,293 awarded in Babergh and £239,510 in Mid Suffolk. Successful projects included a new minibus for The Befriending Scheme, improved disabled access at Kersey Village Hall, solar panel installation at Rickinghall Village Hall, and kitchen refurbishment for Buxhall Village Hall. Applications must be submitted by July 14 and projects completed within eight months of grant approval. More details and application guidance are available on the councils' websites.

Housing issues and Stowmarket regeneration among targets in council's new action plan

At the Annual Council Meeting on May 22, Mid Suffolk District Council outlined plans to tackle housing issues, regenerate Stowmarket, and combat climate change. These initiatives build on The Mid Suffolk Plan, adopted in January, which outlines the district's vision until 2027. Key points include:

1. **Housing Improvements:** Urgent efforts to enhance council housing, including a £672,000 investment to clear repair backlogs and lobbying the government for better social housing funding.
2. **Stowmarket Regeneration:** Collaboration with partners to revitalize Stowmarket's High Street and cultural sector, supported by initiatives like the Town Ranger service.
3. **Environmental Sustainability:** Continued investment in energy-efficient homes, community transport, and local environmental enhancements. The council aims to facilitate community-led housing and renewable energy plans.
4. **Economic and Social Initiatives:** Development of Gateway 14 as a center for green and hi-tech industries, approval of new sporting facilities for Stowmarket, and the launch of a £2 million initiative for home energy efficiency.
5. **Community Engagement:** Support for towns and villages in delivering local projects, completing Neighbourhood Plans, and enhancing building design.
6. **Cost-of-Living Support:** Additional plans to aid residents facing the cost-of-living crisis.

In the last meeting I received cross council support to stay on as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny at Mid Suffolk for the next municipal year, which I am pleased about.

Kind regards

Cllr James Caston