

Mid Suffolk District Council – 2024/25 Annual Report Bramford

Planning and Housing

- **New homes:** Mid Suffolk added eighty-six new council homes to make 3,373. Bramford itself saw sixteen new affordable homes, 2 and 3 bed delivered, plus 3 shared-ownership homes on Bellway. The council's Housing Revenue Account faces financial pressure, last year was 960,000 deficit and predicted for this year is £2.1m. A new HRA business plan proposes rent and service-charge increases to improve sustainability. In May 2024 the Council earmarked £672,000 to clear housing repairs as part of its new housing improvements priority.
- **Planning Policy & Local Plans:** I sit on the workgroup that developed the new Joint Local plan Part 1 (2024–27) in signed off in January 2024 and am currently working on the joint Babergh/Mid Suffolk Local Plan update (pushed to 2029) due to massive government housing targets, as Bramford has had 300 houses built they can be taken off the 400 asked for leaving 100, which I have no idea where we have space for them, we are currently looking at options including the building of a new town, but the housing market does not match the government's ambition.
- **CIL Framework Review** I've spent several meetings reviewing the CIL Framework a lot of which was looking at where it is being used when Section 21 should be, but quite a few changes to eligibility including the need to provide a Multiple User Agreement and remove bidding periods to have an open all year bidding time as lots of poor quality bids would come in close to deadline.
- **Major Developments:** In January 2024 planning committee reviewed the Port One project at Gt Blakenham. I have historically been involved in the planning approval of the earlier warehouses. This large logistics scheme (3 warehouses over 31 ha) proposes a new road access feeding into Bramford's A14 junction (J52), with roundabout improvements. No matter how we see this we must appreciate the fact that this will be the first carbon neutral logistics park in the east with the 150 acre site containing 80 acres of roof space and 35 acres of solar panels producing 5mw of PV energy that is mainly out of sight and bringing 3500 jobs to the area.
- **Fisons:** The viability assessment never happened at the derelict Fison chemical works site, which was very disappointing, but there is hope with Homes England looking to redevelop. There should be much better protection of the site with Suffolk Police tracking down and speaking to trespassers. We now have multi agency monthly meetings to discuss the site and how to make it safer as we have serious concerns that someone may be seriously injured exploring the site, we are also tackling the fly tipping. I must thank the Planning portfolio holder, Andrew Stringer for his support on this matter.
- **Transport:** The Council is expanding community transport: it supports the Community Rail Partnership for the Ipswich–Cambridge line (Thurston, Elmswell, Stowmarket, Needham and continues grants for new bus routes (£600k invested already. Mid Suffolk also installed EV charge pods at Needham Lakes. I have suggested adding Bramford as a future e-bike/hire pod site, but we must look at how successful it is a t NM first.

Community and Culture

- **Developer Levies (CIL):** In the 2023/24 budget year, Mid Suffolk District Council issued Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) demand notices totalling £9,560,299.09. This is split into Infrastructure, District and Neighbourhood. The pot is then split across 44 parishes during this year (Bramford's share between 01 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 was £42,996.28, because of local development). Bramford has used CIL in the past for major projects like the playground and is able to bid for District CIL as well as apply for parish Council CIL.
- **Capital Grants:** The joint Babergh/Mid Suffolk **Capital Grants** scheme re-opened in May 2024. In 2023/24 a total of £367,803 was awarded, Mid Suffolk £239,510: Babergh £128,293. In Mid Suffolk the funding supported projects like insulation and renovations at village halls (e.g. kitchen refurbishments at Buxhall Village Hall. Bramford groups like the Village Hall committee can apply for grants up to £10k for building works or equipment.
- **Wellbeing and Culture:** Mid Suffolk joined countywide health initiatives. The "Feel Good Suffolk" programme (launched Oct 2023) helped over 2,000 residents improve health this includes 730 quit smoking, 1,300 managed weight, 470 increased activity. Locally, GP referrals and MSDC help get people into the gym. In winter 2023, the "Living Well in Winter" fund allocated £15,463 to 14 Mid Suffolk community projects, warm-space events, coffee mornings, etc. Bramford residents' benefit from these programmes and can join activities or apply for small grants. The Council also emphasises community engagement – supporting parish projects and Neighbourhood Plans to help communities steer their planning in the right direction.

Environment and Infrastructure

- **Energy & Efficiency:** The Council is investing heavily in energy efficiency. A flagship Cosy Homes programme (£2.0 million) launched late 2024 to help residents retrofit insulation, heating and solar measures. This ties into the Council plan's energy efficiency initiative, a £2m home-energy scheme. Bramford homeowners with EPC below C can apply for free home-survey vouchers and grant advice via Suffolk Energy portal. Flood/climate resilience projects remain a focus (e.g. tackling river flooding risks, although we do not have any in Bramford).
- **Recycling and Waste:** Mid Suffolk's recycling rate has rose to 42% (2023/24), above the 2022/23 level, and household waste per capita is stable. We use collection reliability statistics, and they show collections are 99.9% on-time. Bramford's bins, recycling and fly-tipping concerns are managed under our district's waste contract. The new rules for Simpler Recycling will come in next year meaning less general waste collection and several more bins, I have concerns but have been told that there will be provision made for people who require more general waste capacity.
- **Green Space:** The Council is planting green infrastructure: e.g. 141 new trees and 2,160 m of hedgerow were planted, and wildflower seeds were sown on council land.
- **Parking** I have ordered local parking enforcement (I asked Ipswich Borough Council to enforce parking at The Street, Gippingstone Road and Leggett Drive in Bramford. I have concerns for safety and would like to stop people parking in the bus stop.

Governance and Representation

- **Council Finance & Budget:** Mid Suffolk continues to enjoy strong finances. The Green-led administration has inherited multi-million-£ surpluses and robust reserves from the previous Conservative administration. The 2025/26 budget was set on 27 Feb 2025 with no increase in Mid Suffolk's council tax a Band D stays at £175.03. The budget expects a £2.4 million surplus for 2025/26 down slightly on prior years. For context, by March 2025 the district's reserves were around £37.8m, underlining ample reserves. This enables continued investment: the 2025/26 Capital Programme of £36.3m includes town regeneration, sports facilities, rural support and a new Skills & Innovation Centre at Stowmarket's Gateway 14.
- **CIFCO Property Company:** The council's joint commercial property arm (CIFCO Capital Ltd) remains in place. Last year CIFCO generated about £1.26m net income, adding to £12m since 2017. Rental arrears are kept below 5% and vacancy is ~3.4% (vs ~8.3% typical). Half of CIFCO's portfolio already meets EPC C efficiency (goal: 100% by 2027), We have CIFCO coming in front of the scrutiny committee in the next two months to look deeply into the business plan to make sure it is sound and to limit the risk of issues going unnoticed.
- **Council Priorities:** The Mid Suffolk Plan (2024–27) adopted in Jan 2024 outlines the district's vision. Its key action priorities (2014–27) include:
Housing repairs (£672k invested to clear council housing backlog.
Stowmarket town regeneration High Street/cultural revival.
Environmental sustainability in energy-efficient homes, net-zero transport.
Economic investment in Gateway 14 as green-tech hub, Stowmarket sports, a £2m home-energy fund
Community engagement in supporting villages, neighbourhood plans
Cost-of-living support for vulnerable residents. Mid Suffolk is implementing many of these initiatives (e.g. the Cosy Homes energy project, new social housing, community grants and town centre schemes).
- **Devolution** The Devolution decision made on our behalf continues to hang over my head, it will surely mean that in 2-3 years that Mid Suffolk District Council will no longer exist, and a Unitary council will take over. The latest paper from government states that a unitary would have adult social care and children's services centralised, no matter how many unitary councils are created, so it seems they are likely to be administered by the mayoral authority for Norfolk and Suffolk as well as many economic and infrastructure departments, there is a lot of talk about what will happen with Ipswich and I can't see any result that has Ipswich not paired with Bramford, so at the moment I am favouring the 3 Unitary system, but will consider the 2. One unitary is about 120 councillors with 6500 residents each, two is about eighty councillors in each with 4500 residents and three is about fifty-seven councillors with 4500 residents, I have 2648 residents at the moment.

After leaving the Conservative group I continue to represent the ward as a Conservative-aligned Independent. I continue to serve as Chair of Overview & Scrutiny and was re-elected this month as well as being the shadow Planning portfolio holder. I continue to do my best to address local concerns like parking, transport grants, and planning. In the last year I have scrutinised six of the seven directorates at the council and continue to plan further investigation to keep the council on track and I continue to press for Bramford's interests.

Kind regards

Cllr James Caston

Bramford Ward

Mid Suffolk District Council