

Subject: Report to Parishes January 2021

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New Year, New Homes

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have invested more than £40m buying 230 new homes for low-income house-hunters.

This multi-million-pound investment in social housing will see new properties added to their existing council house stock of more than 6,000 homes, or made available to buy as shared ownership homes – helping low-income families onto the first rung of the property ladder.

The purchases include 97 new-build homes from developments at Haughley, Stowmarket and Woolpit for Mid Suffolk.

These homes are being built thanks to section 106 agreements – a condition imposed by the local authority requiring developers to provide a certain number of affordable homes as part of their scheme to help the local community.

A further 15 properties have been snapped up in Mid Suffolk with nine more expected to complete soon, while in Babergh, three more sales have completed with a further nine in the pipeline. These properties are available immediately for occupation by our council tenants.

These properties are in addition to construction already underway on council-owned land.

In Mid Suffolk, work is underway transforming the former Needham Market Middle School site and the council's former headquarters to provide a further 130 homes.

Mid Suffolk District Council's cabinet member for housing, Cllr Lavinia Hadingham, said: "As a local authority we have a responsibility to plan and invest in our districts to ensure people have the homes they need, and our communities can continue to thrive."

New service to support residents to live independently and safely in their homes

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' 'Independent Living Service' has been developed to help improve the quality of life of the districts' most vulnerable adults, young people and children.

The new service will offer advice and support where home adaptations, big or small, are needed to help residents live independently, safely and comfortably in their own homes, for as long as possible.

It will also assist residents with a disability, or those who may need adaptations to their home due to changes in their health, via the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and the councils' Minor Adaptation Grants Scheme processes from application to completion of works.

Proposals to move the service in-house will allow the councils to ensure that the service is right for the residents across the district – with better control in the management of allocation of budgets and the processing of applications.

Cllr Hadingham Mid Suffolk District Council Cabinet Member for housing said:

"The Independent Living service will help us enable more of our residents to remain in their homes and live more independently. Bringing the service in-house will, in the long-term, help to reduce demands on Suffolk's care system and the NHS – cutting down on the time residents need to spend in hospital.

Sometimes work needs to be carried out quickly and our teams will ensure that the processes in place allows residents to return to the comfort of their own home, and a safe and secure environment."

The new service will:

- Raise the quality of life, supporting residents to remain in their home independently and safely
- Improve the processing time for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) applications and associated works
- Increase the annual number of applications completed

- Reduced demand on the wider Suffolk care systems
- Help to identify the best option to meet the applicants' needs
- Provide help and support to complete DFG application forms
- Carry out home surveys
- Help source reputable local contractors
- Apply for planning permission and building control consent – if required

The Independent Living Service will work in partnership with Independent Living Suffolk to provide a high standard supportive network that will facilitate independence at home. In addition to offering signposting, financial and relocation assistance across the district, the service will enable each authority to tailor their provision to meet the changing needs of their communities.

Suffolk County Council will be the first point of contact – and residents needing advice, guidance, or support can start the process by using the contact details below.

- Email: ILS@Suffolk.gov.uk
- Call: [0800 121 7711](tel:08001217711) for an assessment by therapy staff.

Once an assessment has been carried out by Suffolk County Council therapy staff, a recommendation will be made on the home adaptations and support needed.

Notes to Editor

The Disabled facilities Grants process was developed to support people with a variation of long-term illnesses or needing from minor adjustments or major changes in the home to ensure that home is safe and comfortable environment, and help toward the cost of making adaptations and proving the facilities to enable the disable person to remain at home

All local authorities have a statutory duty to offer and manage Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) to eligible residents.

The Independent Living Service (ILS) is designed to provide advice on improvements and adaptations to a person's home and to assist them in applying for Local Authority grants, such as the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) or other local Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) Policy Grants including Minor Adaptation Grants, which allows residents to remain living independently and safely within their home. It should be noted that a person's home could be owned, mortgaged, rented from a Registered Provider or privately rented. It does not include those living in Council accommodation, as these adaptations are funded through the Housing Revenue Account.

The service will:

- Offer skilled advice and knowledge in identifying the best option to meet a person's needs to reduce the demand for major adaptations
- Carry out home surveys, provide advice and support resident's to complete application forms for Grants
- Identify reputable local contractors
- Apply for planning permission and building control consent
- Ensure a satisfactory standard of work upon completion
- Ensure value for money is achieved at all times

Go ahead for emission-cutting fuel plans

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils will cut their fleet's carbon emissions by up to 90% – supporting the councils' carbon neutral aims.

The move follows approval by both councils' cabinets this week, to switch their vehicle fleet to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO).

Changes form a major step in [the councils' Carbon Reduction Management Plan](#), which sets out how net zero carbon emissions aim to be achieved by 2030.

Both councils will see a significant reduction in pollutant emissions from their fleet, including up to a 90% reduction in CO₂. It will also support a circular economy, as the HVO fuel is produced from sustainable feedstock, including waste cooking oil.

Currently, the councils' vehicle fleet represents 26% of the councils' total CO₂ emissions, approximately 880 tonnes per year.

The fleet includes the councils' 35 waste lorries, as well as some vehicles used by the public realm and housing services.

Moving to the new fuel will cost an initial £50k per council for new fuel tanks. A further estimated £56 - £97k per year, per council, over the next three years, will cover fuel costs.

However, by using HVO, lower maintenance costs and longer engine life for the vehicles are expected.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money collected from new development is anticipated to cover most of the initial cost of the two HVO tanks. These will be located at the councils' depots in Stowmarket and Sudbury.

Cllr Jessica Fleming, cabinet member for environment at Mid Suffolk District Council, said:

“Helping to create bright and healthy futures for the next generation, while protecting the environment, is one of our most important jobs.

“This move to a greener and cleaner fuel for our fleet will bring us significantly closer to achieving our commitment to be net zero carbon by 2030.

“We know we can't create a cleaner and healthier environment on our own. However, we hope by setting an example others will be encouraged to follow.”

Formal procurement of a fuel supplier will start straight away, with the changeover expected to be fully rolled out by Summer 2021.

Business centre boosts councils' income

Image

Property investment company CIFCO Capital Ltd has invested £5.7m in a Basingstoke business centre, so future rental income can be invested back into Babergh and Mid Suffolk’s council services.

CIFCO, which is wholly owned by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, has purchased the business centre, on Winchester Road. The property is set to bring in more than £300k in annual rent from its 14 established business tenants.

The purchase is the latest in CIFCO’s acquisition programme, with approximately £85m out of the £100m agreed by councillors invested so far. The remaining funds are due to be invested by the end of March this year– six months earlier than the target agreed by councillors at both Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils last year.

The latest acquisitions bring the total number of properties in the CIFCO portfolio up to 18– and further diversifies its range of tenants to minimise exposure to any one sector, tenant or location.

CIFCO was established jointly by Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils in 2017 to generate income through property investment to offset reductions in funding from central Government. Since its launch, CIFCO has brought in almost £4m of net income to the Councils, which has been reinvested into council services.

The returns received from CIFCO allow the councils to meet loan repayments, with extra income on top then ploughed back into council services – at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has significantly affected other ‘traditional’ income streams.

The virus has affected almost all businesses, however the diverse nature of its portfolio has mitigated the risks and rent collection levels remain above industry averages- with debt repayments to the Councils continuing to be made in full.

Mid Suffolk District Council leader Cllr Suzie Morley said: “CIFCO is continuing to make careful decisions about the properties it invests in, ensuring that there is a balance of risk with all its acquisitions: delivering a long-term income to support our council’s finances now – and building a portfolio of commercial property as a valuable investment for our residents and communities for years to come.”

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