

September report from District Councillor, Lavinia Hadingham

An Update on Covid-19 in Suffolk

August saw us reach the end of the Government's roadmap out of lockdown, however our work to support the district's recovery continues.

Regular bulletins continue to be produced to give a snapshot of the current Covid-19 situation in Suffolk - along with updates on the work being carried out as part of Suffolk's Local Outbreak Control Plan. You can find the bulletins [via the Suffolk County Council website](#).

An update on the vaccine rollout can be found on the [SNEE NHS COVID-19 Vaccination Service website](#).

We continue to play our part in response to the pandemic, alongside public sector colleagues within the Suffolk Resilience Forum, supporting in the event of local outbreaks as well as continuing to offer support to our communities and businesses. Please see the council website for more.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk join calls for devolution talks with Government

Public sector leaders in Suffolk have written to the Secretary of State responsible for local government to say they welcome early discussions with Ministers about a possible devolution deal for Suffolk.

In a joint letter sent to Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Babergh's Cllr John Ward and Mid Suffolk's Cllr Suzie Morley, joined leaders of all of Suffolk's six councils and Police and Crime Commissioner Tim Passmore, seeking early discussion over devolved decision-making powers and public funding for the county.

The letter says: "Suffolk has already demonstrated its credibility as a place where Government will find strong and ambitious delivery partners.

"The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders (SPSL) group...has a track record of effective partnership working. These robust relationships enable more innovative ways of working, including exploring opportunities for devolution as part of a County Deal.

"Suffolk...is an ideal place to help Government demonstrate how levelling up can work in diverse geographies. Suffolk has a strong offer to make to Government and we would welcome early discussions with MHCLG Ministers to explore proposals for a County Deal ahead of the White Paper being published."

The Government wrote to councils in July 2021, setting out its ambition to make available to county areas the kind of devolved powers currently enjoyed by larger cities and urban areas. It's part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda and will see a White Paper published in the coming months.

Green light for Gateway 14

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Councillors at Mid Suffolk District Council this week approved initial plans, with conditions, for Gateway 14 – Stowmarket’s 2.45 million square foot, innovation, business and logistics park.

Gateway 14, adjacent to the A14, is set to create thousands of jobs and bring a massive boost to the region’s economy, but at last month’s [planning committee meeting](#), councillors also sought to further mitigate its impact on the environment and neighbouring communities.

The cross-party planning committee approved the hybrid application subject to bolstering recommendations by planning officers by adding conditions around landscaping, biodiversity, construction traffic, and a Section 106 agreement – a legal obligation for a developer to contribute to community facilities.

Show homes give first glimpse of council’s investment in Needham

Show homes in Needham Market are opening their doors to potential buyers this weekend – in the first phase of Mid Suffolk District Council’s multi-million investment in the town.

Five houses on the new Chambers Green development – built on the council’s former office complex in the town – are now open for viewing by appointment, with councillors amongst the first over the threshold to see the new homes for themselves.

The development is being delivered by Mid Suffolk Growth – a joint venture between Mid Suffolk District Council and Norse Group set up to deliver housing and promote sustainable growth across the district.

The first phase sees the Council’s former headquarters transformed into a combination of two and three bed detached and semi-detached houses, as well as one and two bed apartments and a retail unit. Ten of these properties will be affordable homes, helping to support those on lower incomes.

Part of the original headquarters building is listed, and its character and period features will be preserved. The former bowling green next to the site will be maintained as open space, with a community walk and benches to be added near the existing duck pond.

The Chambers Green development is, part of a wider vision for Needham Market – which will ultimately see a total of 133 new houses, flats and bungalows in the town, a natural community space and walk, a new library, a café and visitor centre at nearby Needham Lake, and improved access between the lake and town to boost visitor numbers to the high street.

The first phase of 32 homes at Chambers Green is due to be completed by Spring 2022. The second phase will provide an additional 60 homes, and the transformation of the former Middle School will create a further 41 homes.

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The Middle School development also includes converting the existing Victorian school building into a library to replace the town's current library provision.

At the same time, the council's investment in the new visitor centre is expected to attract more visitors to enjoy the open space at Needham Lake. A new pedestrian access through Needham Market train station will then provide easy access from Needham Lake to the town centre where visitors can enjoy the High Street's independent shops and restaurants.

Local Energy Showcase will champion green businesses

Businesses and community organisations are being urged to tackle climate change by joining Suffolk's first ever showcase event celebrating sustainability and green energy.

The Local Energy Showcase, organised by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, will promote how different types of energy can be used by communities and businesses help reduce their impact on the environment, lower costs and contribute to the fight against climate change.

[Tickets are now available](#) for the two-day extravaganza, at Wherstead Park in Ipswich on 21 and 22 October. The event is open to all businesses with an interest in finding out more about local energy solutions and as well as community groups and parishes who would like to understand and explore the benefits of using local energy solutions.

The Local Energy Showcase, marks the Councils' recognition of a climate emergency and their commitment to the Suffolk-wide aim to become carbon neutral by 2030, aims to inform and update visitors on the latest in green energy. Featuring keynote speeches from specialists in the field, workshops, as well as the chance to participate in a Q&A session with a panel of experts.

The event will feature a marketplace for green energy businesses and organisations to showcase their products and services, demonstrate how local energy solutions can be installed and used, and how switching energy supplies can lower greenhouse emissions and reduce energy costs.

Delegates will have the opportunity to network with and learn from leaders in the fields of carbon reduction, heat networks and solar energy.

Practical workshops will include understanding the concepts of becoming net zero, how to access green grants and funding, and how to reduce energy consumption.

During day one, businesses will find out what local energy solutions are available to them, how technology can be used to boost the benefits of green energy and how, local energy is a growing sector with the potential of bringing more skilled jobs to the region.

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On day two, local groups and parishes will learn how solutions such as solar energy and ground source heat pumps can power whole communities, reducing costs and supporting local ambitions of cleaner and greener places to live, work and visit.

Keynote speakers include Shivali Mathur, from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Emma Bridge, of Community Energy England, who will share real examples of how businesses and community groups can drive forward their green ambitions, improve their energy efficiency and reduce costs.

Statement regarding Afghan refugees

On Wednesday 18 August, the Government announced its new resettlement scheme for Afghan refugees. Whilst the full details are yet to be confirmed, it is crystal clear that the Government needs local authorities everywhere to step up and support this national effort.

All councils in Suffolk are committed to this cause. We have already helped a small number of Afghan interpreters and their families to resettle in Suffolk, in addition to ongoing work to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children and other refugees entering the UK. In the coming days and weeks, the district, borough and county councils will continue working with the Government to do what we can to provide assistance to vulnerable refugees.

Times like this call for acts of humanity. Suffolk will play its part.

A [Suffolk County Council webpage](#) has been created in the event of offers of help from your towns and parishes