

District Councillor's Report: Harry Richardson

Mid Suffolk District Council

At Mid Suffolk's most recent meeting on Thursday 23rd September, the Council approved the District's first dedicated Wellbeing Strategy. This aims to ensure that everyone in Mid Suffolk has the best possible conditions for good wellbeing, and consideration has been given to the approach required by the Council and its partners to achieve this, as well as the strategic objectives required to get the right results.

There are also three long term outcomes included in the strategy, which maps out the Council's wellbeing ambitions until 2027:

- Families lead active, healthy, safe and independent lives and manage their own health & wellbeing
- Sustainable and inclusive places, and spaces, which maximise health & wellbeing opportunities and benefits
- Health inequalities will be reduced

Whilst the comprehensive strategy links to other Council priorities including tackling homelessness and addressing climate change, it will primarily focus on five key themes which have the most meaningful impact on health and wellbeing, consisting of personal wellbeing, health, relationships, what we do and where we live.

These will help inform the strategy's high-level actions and detailed delivery plan – subject to ongoing review to ensure relevance in the ever-changing landscape.

The strategy has also been shaped by extensive research, with wellbeing factors – including mental and physical health, relationships, and surroundings – being measured across Mid Suffolk to identify current strengths and weaknesses.

This highlighted the positive work of the Council's communities team and its partners to date, including offering art therapy and mental health support for new parents, holiday activity and food projects for low income families, cookery courses for elderly and isolated residents, and sports activities such as free outdoor fitness classes in Stowmarket.

Invaluable support was also given to communities during the Covid-19 pandemic, with Council officers making over 25,000 calls to housing tenants and contact made with more than 6,000 Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents to offer help and advice during lockdown. This was in addition to dealing with over 1,500 calls from the Home, But Not Alone service, which provided a lifeline for those needing assistance with financial difficulties, social isolation or obtaining essential food and medical supplies in the peak of the pandemic.

A dedicated Covid-19 Emerging Needs Grant was also set up, which saw over £171,000 paid to charities and organisations across Babergh and Mid Suffolk. A further £1.4 million was paid in other council community grants during 2020/21, with recipients including Citizens Advice, Community Action Suffolk, Rural Coffee Caravan and Lighthouse Women's Aid.

The Wellbeing Strategy will support this existing work and complement the recently refreshed Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy and recruitment of a new Communities and Wellbeing Assistant Director – a shared post with the Clinical Commissioning Groups – ensuring Babergh and Mid Suffolk remain great communities with bright and healthy futures that everyone is proud to call home.

There have also been a number of initiatives launched in the previous weeks and so I have included below a summary of the major updates across the District:

Success for Babergh and Mid Suffolk at national awards

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils received national recognition this month for their innovative support of communities through Covid and beyond – winning bronze in the overall Council of the Year category of the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards 2021, and gold for our Virtual High Street initiative supporting local retailers.

Ultra-low emission HVO fleet takes to the road

Babergh and Mid Suffolk are the first rural UK councils to switch their fleet to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) – slashing carbon emissions by up to 90% and supporting the councils' carbon neutral aims.

Joint Local Plan public examination resumes

The Hearing Sessions for the public examination of our Joint Local Plan have resumed. Sessions are being held virtually, enabling them to be fully inclusive, whilst also ensuring public safety, and are being live streamed in real time on the councils' Joint Local Plan YouTube channel, should you wish to follow the plan's progress.

Chance to have your say on the future of parking

Everyone is encouraged to have their say on Babergh and Mid Suffolk's future parking strategy - with residents, businesses and visitors across the districts urged to help shape plans for the next decade. Details are available on our website.

Work progressing well on Woolpit community car park

Construction is well underway on a much-needed community car park, which will initially provide 120-spaces for Woolpit Health Centre to help with the Covid-19 and flu vaccination efforts this winter. Drainage and earth works have already finished and the car park is on schedule to be completed in November

I hope that this report has been useful but if a member of the Parish Council wishes to discuss any of the above further then please do not hesitate to contact me via the email address below.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Harry Richardson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Cllr Harry Richardson JP

Mid Suffolk District Councillor for Thurston Ward

Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing

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