

District Councillor's Report: Harry Richardson

At our Annual Meeting on Thursday 26th May Cllr James Caston was elected Chairman of Mid Suffolk District Council, replacing Cllr Paul Ekpenyong. Cllr Ekpenyong raised £1,545 for East Anglia's Children's Hospices as his chosen charity during his year in office.

There have also been a number of developments in recent weeks, so I have included below a summary of the main updates from the last month:

Councils consider plan to help residents tackle cost of living

Cabinet members at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are to consider a five-point action plan during meetings next month, to support residents and staff through the cost-of-living crisis.

In a report published this week, the councils outlined the stark financial challenges faced by many families, with increasing food and energy bills and rising inflation leading to falling living standards and risk of recession.

In response, the councils are considering a 5-point plan, bringing together work already underway with new initiatives. The plan brings together a suite of measures that focus on providing advice and support, maintaining people's health, and building on work already underway since the launch of the councils' Communities and Wellbeing strategies.

This includes support and funding for local Citizens' Advice centres and local community organisations; specialist support for council tenants struggling to pay their rent; a wide range of discretionary payments, grants, and reductions for those facing financial hardship; and the Holiday Activity and Food programme to combat holiday hunger for families who are struggling through the school breaks.

In addition, the councils will be looking to expand the work it is already doing around social prescribing, working in partnership with health colleagues and partners to help residents maintain good health – whether in our green spaces or through access to leisure facilities.

Proposals also exploring new possibilities such as a discretionary fuel and travel voucher scheme to tackle loneliness for people who are isolated or vulnerable – ensuring family and friends can continue to visit.

Pending approval at next months' meetings, one of the first actions will be to appoint a Cost-of-Living Co-ordinator to help key agencies across the districts to join forces so help can be deployed where it is needed most.

Plans to revitalise sport, leisure, and wellbeing in Stowmarket to be considered

Stowmarket could soon benefit from a new leisure and wellbeing hub if funding is agreed by Mid Suffolk District Council next month.

The funding will enable Mid Suffolk District Council to take the proposals to the next stage and will include developing a detailed design for the masterplan, holding public consultation events to share plans and prepare and submit a planning application for the project. During this phase, the council will work in collaboration with partners and stakeholders to ensure the site will be used most effectively for everyone involved.

The proposal for the health and wellbeing hub in Stowmarket will outline plans to bring together a range of sports, leisure and health facilities to create a real benefit to local communities. The masterplan incorporates two parcels of land in the northwest of Stowmarket, including land surrounding Stowmarket High School and Chilton Fields. Currently these sites offer sport provision for rugby, cricket, football, and tennis.

Much of the existing sports provision is in need of renewal and replacement and the project aims to provide modern, sustainable sport and wellbeing facilities, created by strong partnership working. The draft masterplan includes a 4g football pitch and a multi-use 2g pitch, a mini athletics track, new sports pavilion, a multi-use games area, four indoor sports courts, new cricket square and nets and a multi-agency wellbeing hub.

In addition, the proposal will reshape current car parking at Chilton Fields, create additional parking at the wellbeing hub as well as introducing a multi-surface perimeter track to encourage running and walking. In addition to creating modern facilities for sport and leisure and access to a range of health and wellbeing services, the sport and wellbeing hub will also provide a boost to the local economy supporting sport and health providers and creating job and training opportunities in this growth sector.

The proposed masterplan has been developed in partnership with a number of key stakeholders including Suffolk County Council, Stowmarket Town Council, local school, leisure centre, local CCGs, Active Suffolk, local sports clubs and Sport England.

School's Out activities to support families throughout May half-term

Den-building, archery, outdoor cooking, filmmaking, sport, art, and science are among a boredom-busting programme of activities this half-term, thanks to Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and partners. The varied programme of activities aim to help families through the holidays, as part of the councils' commitment to supporting residents' health and wellbeing.

Explore Outdoor are once again offering outdoor cooking masterclasses to families during the school break in several locations across the districts – cementing the councils' commitment to reducing health inequalities, as set out in their recently adopted Wellbeing Strategy.

Families are given the opportunity to learn how to cook a hearty and nutritious meal in the outdoors. In addition, they receive a free box of ingredients and recipe cards so they can prepare healthy, tasty food at home – supporting the councils' ongoing ambition to combat holiday hunger.

Explore Outdoor will also be providing a range of outdoor activities, including archery, shelter building, firelighting and many other outdoor pursuits. Additionally, there will be sessions for football, arts and crafts, dodgeball, fun science experiments and filmmaking workshops at

locations across the districts including Brantham, Claydon, Hadleigh, Stowmarket and Sudbury.

Although free places are allocated on a needs basis – with local schools identifying families in receipt of free school meals or eligible for other reasons – children not meeting this criteria are also welcome to participate in many of the events for a small cost.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk to host sprints and climbs for The Women's Tour stage one race

On 6 June, The Women's Tour will race through Babergh and Mid Suffolk after setting off from Colchester, heading towards the finish on Angel Hill in Bury St Edmunds.

The race, which is one of the major events for the Festival of Suffolk which celebrates the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, features sprint and climb sections (known as Queen of the Mountains) to test the riders' endurance.

This year's race will see all endurance sections take place in Babergh. The sprints will be in Holbrook and Hadleigh, while the Queen of the Mountain climbs will be in Brantham and Bildeston.

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,



Cllr Harry Richardson JP

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