



## Mid Suffolk District Council

### Report for The Stonhams Ward – February 2018

## Leisure Centre has been Crowned 'Excellent'

Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre, which is operated by Everyone Active in partnership with Mid Suffolk District Council, is celebrating after being named as an excellent facility by an external assessor.

The centre was awarded the status of 'excellent' by Quest, the UK's Quality Scheme for sports and leisure, after undergoing a rigorous inspection and interview process.

The award is assessed on core modules including, community outcomes, customer experience and insight, team and skills development, cleaning and housekeeping, maintenance and equipment, environment, planning to improve and health and safety.

Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre offers a wide-range of activities that encourage everyone in the local community to improve their health and wellbeing. The Quest report highlighted that Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre delivers an 'excellent' service that engages with children and older people in the community.

These activities include chair-based exercise classes and walking sports for the older members in the community, and a fantastic Playworld and Summer Playworld facility for youngsters.

The centre boasts a 60-station fitness suite, which houses the latest cardio-vascular and strength training equipment, and a 25m, six lane swimming pool which offers a number of aquatic activities including Swim England accredited swimming lessons.

Anselm Gurney, Everyone Active's contract manager, said: "We are delighted that Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre has been classified as 'excellent'. We are committed to offering high-quality facilities and an extensive range of activities that encourage everyone, regardless of their age or ability, to become more active, more often.

"This award recognises the services we provide at the centre, but also the work we do alongside our partners in the community to improve the health and wellbeing of Stowmarket's residents. I am incredibly proud of the team at Mid Suffolk for what we have achieved and the difference we are making to people's lives on a daily basis."

Cllr Diana Kearsley, Mid Suffolk District Council Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing said, "This is a fantastic achievement by the whole team at the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and I would like to pass on my congratulations to everyone involved. We encourage all those who live and work in Mid Suffolk to lead more active lives and leisure centres play a huge role in helping people to do this. For those who haven't yet been along to see for themselves what is on offer, we hope they will now be keen to see these first class facilities and start to enjoy the many benefits of taking exercise."

## Police Dogs in Training in Needham Market

**The former Mid Suffolk District Council offices in Needham Market have temporary occupants: Suffolk Police dogs in training.**

The offices in Needham Market, which Mid Suffolk District Council vacated in November last year, are now in use to train police dogs for Suffolk Police.



Suffolk Police's Dog Section trains general purpose dogs (German shepherds) as well as specialist dogs (spaniels and Labradors) in both outdoor and indoor environments. The former offices in Needham Market offer an ideal opportunity to train these dogs in an office environment in which the dogs can train in tracking down people, drugs, explosive training aids, cash, ammunition or firearms.

On Monday 21 January the first three dogs – Ivan, Zuma and Woody – were taken to the former offices. Ivan, a German Shepherd, was tasked with tracking down PC Tony Russell, located somewhere in the building, after which Zuma and Woody, both Springer Spaniels, were set to locate hidden drugs by PC Simon Hughes.

Police dogs undergo a rigorous 13 week training programme when first learning their role, followed by regular training sessions until they retire.

The training is an interim measure while the long-term future of the site is secured. As part of the training Suffolk Police could arrive at the offices at any time of day or night to allow the trainee dogs to get used to the unpredictable schedule of police work.

Residents who see police vehicles attending the site at odd hours should not be alarmed as this is part of the training. The former offices in Needham Market are also protected by 24/7 security to ensure there is no misuse of the site. All equipment used in the training of the dogs is brought to the site by Suffolk Police, and removed again when the dogs leave.

The use of the site is being provided to Suffolk Police by Mid Suffolk District Council at no cost, in the interests of making the best use of the public sector estate in the county for Suffolk residents.

Cllr Nick Gowrley, Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council and Cabinet Member for Assets and Investment, said: "The former offices in Needham Market is a key site within the town, and we're working hard to secure a future for the site that will help Needham grow and be the stronger for it. While we do so, we want to put the site to the best possible use. Welcoming PC Russell and his police dogs to the site not only helps Suffolk Police prepare their Dog Section for any emergency, it also makes sure the former officers are still being used for the people of Suffolk.

"This is an interim measure, and we will be updating residents shortly on what comes next at the site."

Temporary Sergeant James Thomas of Suffolk Constabulary, said: "We are extremely grateful to the district council for allowing us to use this space for general and specialist training as it is of great benefit to the force and the dogs."

Photographs of Ivan, Zuma and Woody undergoing training in the former offices are available on the council's [Flickr pages](#).

## £400,000 Community Housing Fund Open for Applicants

**Communities in Babergh and Mid Suffolk are now able to apply for a share of £415,000 funding to develop Community Led Housing.**

Community Led Housing empowers local groups to identify what housing is needed in their area, the best location for it and to work with partners to deliver those developments.

Any communities interested in applying for funding can contact a newly appointed Community Housing Enabling Officer, who will walk applicants through the process, the benefits and the requirements of Community Led Housing. They can be contacted via:



**Elizabeth Ling, Community Housing Enabling Officer – 07808 201 939, or by [email](#).**

Or via post at:

Community Housing Fund, Strategic Planning Team  
Endeavour House  
8 Russell Road  
Ipswich  
Suffolk IP1 2BX

The Community Housing Enabling Officer can talk groups through the application process, or simply discuss the role of Community-Led Housing in meeting need and how a group can shape development in their area.

The funding – including £189,741 for Babergh communities and £225,476 for Mid Suffolk – was secured from the Department for Communities and Local Government last year. The fund could be used to conduct a Local Housing Needs Assessment within a community, to cover legal costs associated with land purchase such as conveyancing, or to cover technical and professional costs associated with development such as site surveying.

The councils will work closely with community-led housing groups and other stakeholders – such as the Community Land Trusts network and the Homes England – to put the right tools in place to ensure efficient delivery of new houses over the coming years.

The Lavenham Community Land Trust is an example of one of these groups in action, who have begun construction on a new housing scheme in Harwood Place, Lavenham with partners Hastoe Housing Association. This new funding will allow other communities across Babergh and Mid Suffolk to follow this example and bring forward housing to meet local needs in their areas.

Cllr Jan Osborne, Babergh District Cabinet Member for Housing, said: “Community Led Housing delivers the houses we need in a completely different way to large scale developments. The Lavenham Community Land Trust has already demonstrated what can be accomplished with this model, and these funds can help other towns and villages across Babergh to follow their example.”

Cllr Jill Wilshaw, Mid Suffolk District Council Cabinet Member for Housing, said: “We know we need to build more houses in the coming year, but we have a choice about how we build them. Community Led Housing allows people who know their area and know their needs to create the housing they’ll be living with: it puts the community at the heart of growth, and I’d urge any groups interested in being part of that to get in touch and talk about how to get involved.”

## **Landlords Needed to take in Single Lodgers who are Struggling to Find Affordable Accommodation**

**Single people who are struggling to find affordable accommodation are being matched up with householders with a spare bedroom in a pioneering scheme.**

More potential landlords are needed to get involved in the initiative to reduce homelessness, which is being run by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils in partnership with Solo Housing.

The councils will refer single people they work with to the Solo Housing Lodging Scheme, while others may refer themselves or be put in touch by agencies. Solo Housing will carry out a detailed assessment of each person’s circumstances and needs. Some people may be working but on very low incomes while others may have been through the breakup of a relationship or be homeless or at risk of becoming so.



If the person is suitable to become a lodger, Solo Housing will carefully match them to a landlord living in the area, whom they have visited to see the accommodation being offered and discuss any criteria the landlord is seeking in a prospective tenant.

Solo Housing's Chief Executive, Carolyn Howell said, 'It's a very simple and successful model, Solo provides practical help and advice to anyone who has a spare room in their house that they would like to rent out. At the same time, we will use our assessment criteria to match suitable people to available rooms, providing advice and support to single people who may like to take up a lodging offer. The service aims to provide a simple solution for those who would like to rent out a room, perhaps to help them pay their bills, or for companionship, and at the same time provides a housing solution for a single person who may not be able to access other suitable affordable accommodation on their own.'

One of the first landladies to sign up for the Solo Housing Lodging Scheme is Joan, who lives in the Babergh District. She said "As an elderly female, who lives independently, I didn't want to be alone, especially at night, so taking in a lodger that met with my requirements was very helpful. Solo met with the prospective lodger to make sure they were suitable for my circumstances and helped me with the paperwork. It all seemed very thorough. I really appreciate the company and social interaction and my current lodger helps with small jobs around the home."

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' Homelessness Team took 227 homeless applications in 2016/17. In addition to this, they prevented homelessness in more than 450 cases and are hoping this scheme will help to settle more people at risk of becoming homeless into permanent accommodation.

CLLr Jan Osborne, Babergh District Council Cabinet Member for Housing said, "We are delighted to be joining forces with Solo Housing and rolling out this scheme across Babergh. What is so wonderfully unique about this initiative is that it not only helps those who are desperate to find somewhere safe and affordable to live, but also provides many wonderful benefits to those who are prepared to share their homes with a lodger."

CLLr Jill Wilshaw, Mid Suffolk District Council Cabinet Member for Housing said, "Tackling the problem of homelessness and ensuring people have somewhere to live is critically important to us as we know that housing is key to the health and wellbeing of our communities. Our homelessness team already do an outstanding job to help anyone who comes to us for help and this partnership will provide valuable additional support to help them tackle this problem."

To find out more about joining the Solo Lodging Scheme as a landlord, please visit the [Solo Housing website](#), contact Solo Housing by [email](#), or telephone 01379 640250.

## Council to invest £2.56m in Stowmarket

**Last night Mid Suffolk District Council's Cabinet voted to invest £2.56 million in the Regal Theatre Stowmarket Improvement Project.**

The investment, consisting of £1.56m in capital grant from Mid Suffolk District Council, and £1million in a loan to Stowmarket Town Council, will enable two new cinema screens to be added to the Regal. The building in Ipswich Street, Stowmarket, currently has a single auditorium which is used for theatre performances as well as to show films.

These new 87 and 57 seat screens, plus the renovation of the existing auditorium and foyer, are predicted to increase attendance at the Regal Theatre by approximately 40% from around 63,000 people a year to 114,800. The increase in visitor numbers are expected to generate between an extra £500,000 and £1m annually for the local economy.



The project is also expected to create between 10 and 20 new jobs. The Mid Suffolk District Council-owned Ipswich Street Car Park, which is next to the Regal Theatre, will be rearranged to improve its layout.

The Regal Theatre Stowmarket Improvement Project has been identified as an investment project in Mid Suffolk District Council's Stowmarket Action Plan, which was also supported at the Vision for Prosperity events held in the town last summer.

The Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council and Cabinet Member for Assets and Investment, Cllr Nick Gowrley, said: "The Regal Theatre is a truly loved institution in Stowmarket, offering the community a place to come together and stage their own productions as well as screening the latest films. The extra cinema screens will attract new audiences and enable us to show more newly released films and a wider variety of other movies.

"The Regal has been at the heart of Stowmarket for a long time, not only thanks to its cinema screens but due to its hard work with community theatre groups, Dementia Friendly Screenings and hosting touring performances from across the country for residents of our town to enjoy.

"However, this funding is not just about the Regal: it is about investing in the future of Stowmarket by increasing visitor spending in our town by up to £1million a year and creating up to a score of new jobs. Improving the layout of Ipswich Street Car Park will also make it easier for visitors to support the businesses that drive our local economy."

Stowmarket Town Councillor Barry Salmon said: "We are delighted that the District Council is supporting this project. The Regal Theatre is hugely popular and it is great news for the town that both the District and Town Councils are willing to invest in its continuing success.

"We wish to see a modern entertainment venue at the south-eastern gateway to the town centre which can be used for civic and community purposes, cinema and theatre."