

**Councils submit Joint Local Plan for examination.**

Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils have submitted their Joint Local Plan for independent examination by the Secretary of State. Following both councils opting to prepare a Joint Local Plan in 2016, careful consideration has been given to how the districts will balance the delivery of housing growth, important infrastructure, and essential employment, while safeguarding the local natural and historic environment until 2037. Residents, local businesses and other stakeholders were invited to have their say on proposals at a public consultation in 2017, when more than 14,000 representations were received. This helped inform the preferred options consultation in July 2019, during which a further 4,000 comments were made by consultees. Public feedback has been reflected in the final version of the plan, which outlines how and where future development should take place – enabling Government housing targets to be met, whilst also supporting the councils' ambition to build thriving communities. Providing the facilities needed to keep pace with growth, such as schools and GP surgeries, forms a key part of the plan and is detailed in the accompanying Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Importance has also been given to sustainable development and transport options, as well as protecting and enhancing the districts' natural environment and heritage – meeting the councils' ongoing commitment to addressing climate change and increasing biodiversity. In addition, the plan focuses on developing the local economy, revitalising town centres and encouraging tourism, at a time when this is needed more than ever. Officers have also worked with partners, including Natural England, the Environment Agency, Historic England and others, to co-ordinate a strategic approach and the plan is supported by an extensive evidence base to ensure its soundness and deliverability. The final version of the plan was debated by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils last year before councillors moved to submit the plan for examination by the Secretary of State, after a six-week period inviting representations on the legal compliance and soundness of the plan. These representations have now been published and submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration during the examination. Since its publication in November, the plan has carried some weight in the planning decision making process and, once adopted, will provide a clear and transparent approach to guide future development.

**Mid Suffolk communities receive close to £1 million in grants.**

Mid Suffolk District Council awarded community grants totalling £996,855 in the 2020/21 financial year – supporting the district's Covid response and enabling improvements to local community venues and sports and leisure facilities. During the year, council officers have worked with clubs and organisations in the district to identify need and ensure that vital grant funding has made a real difference to Mid Suffolk's communities. The council has also acknowledged the key role of community groups, along with town and parish councils, in easing the challenges faced by residents during coronavirus, and a new dedicated Covid-19 Emerging Needs Grant opened last May to help the district through the peak of the pandemic. More than 60 organisations benefitted from funding, including good neighbour schemes, foodbanks and community outreach projects.

**MSDC/Babergh Tree, Hedgerow and Wildflower planting scheme application deadline extended.**

This scheme offers free trees and hedgerow plants to all parishes regardless of whether the planting is on council, parish, church, or private land. It is preferred that applications are submitted by Parish councils so that Parish local knowledge ensures that the right trees are planted in the right place. The major change to the scheme is that it is now a rolling programme of tree and hedge planting with no deadline for application submission, or dates by which trees or hedgerow plants need to be in the ground. It is not expected that all trees will be planted this year and there will be funding for subsequent years to come. There is also an associated scheme for wildflower planting.

To find out more please contact [biodiversity@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:biodiversity@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk)