

Little Blakenham

CIFCO

Cifco, the Councils' commercial property arm continues to generate income for districts. The value of its properties increased by some £10 million giving rise to a profit of £6.7m last year. It generated £1.7m in net income for Mid Suffolk after payment of £468k long- and short-term interest on the £49 million the council borrowed to fund this enterprise.

I remain concerned that, despite the considerable income there are issues that represent significant risk:

- Some 20m of the district borrowings are short term and rates are rising significantly. They were at 0.51% but the LIBOR is now 4.18% and that could cost another 700k/year.
- Commercial property requires substantial spend for refurbishment when tenants change
- There is a need to improve the EPC ratings of the buildings to present C or above by 2025 and to B or above by 2028. Currently 58 % are D, E or F and the plan to fix this is tenuous.
- Finally, these properties are seen as a legacy for future taxpayers, but commercial buildings are frequently declared not fit for purpose and valueless after a limited life.

New Innovate to Elevate programme launches for businesses

A new 12-month partnership between the University of Essex and the District Councils will give businesses in Babergh & Mid Suffolk an opportunity to receive an innovation boost. The new [Innovate to Elevate: Babergh & Mid Suffolk programme](#) is inviting local businesses to apply to participate in fully funded collaborative projects with the University of Essex, which will help them take the next steps towards innovation and growth.

Jointly funded and supported by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and the University, the initiative is offering access to highly experienced academics and research staff from Essex to find solutions to local business challenges to help them thrive.

Planning

The latest calculation of the Council's 5 Year Housing Land Supply position is in draft form for consultation. The Five-Year Requirement is for 2,777 units and the Council can demonstrate 6,043 units are in the pipeline. This represents a 10.88 year's land supply and 3,266 units over the top! Last month's Government appeared intent on making planning permissions easier to obtain and that has been a possibility for some time. We have yet to hear what the Sunak Government intends to do but the country is not meeting the 300,000 per year housing target.

Masons Landfill

The County has extended the life of the Masons Quarry landfill site to 2032 so we must now wait to see what action Valley Ridge take in response. The site apparently now takes some 240,000 tonnes of waste per year, although the County Council doubted that figure, from an area that includes North Essex, parts of Norfolk and Cambridge. Much of this waste is inert and or other material that cannot be incinerated, for instance asbestos, plasterboard, or soils.

Gateway 14

At the Development Control A meeting on the 12th October we gave detailed planning consent to the reserved matters for the first unit at Gateway 14, Stowmarket, to be occupied by home, garden and leisure products retailer The Range. They will own the building after a £200m

investment. It will be a very large 105,298 sqm distribution warehouse, 2,787 sqm office and 814 sqm refuse and recycling unit employing some 1650 people. It will have 802 car, 558 cycle, and 200 truck parking spaces with 160 EV active, and 160 passive EV charging points.

The site, together with Port One at Great Blakenham is a Freeport and MSDC has entered an expression of interest to change both to tax-free investment zones but these may not progress under this month's government.

Barham

This week we gave reserved matters approval to the development on Barham Church Lane. There had been improvements since the outline approval stage after significant engagement with Claydon parish council. A Design Code has been produced to guide development in line with the latest NPPF processes and did give a clear and attractive view of the developer's claimed intentions.

Points of interest were a wide central spine road incorporating swales either side of the highway, a footway one side and shared cycle and footway the other. Private drives (short access roads) serve small groups of houses, providing a substantial area of additional parking. This should solve the problems we get by complying with the County parking standards. The developer agreed to use heat pumps, a low carbon heat source, ahead of the 2025 change in the building regulations. They will fit car charging points and offer residents the opportunity to purchase Solar PV Panels which should be less expensive to fit while electricians are on site.

This is a pleasant contrast to developer attitudes in the preceding application for around 260 homes in Stowmarket. That developer would implement the building regs that are mandatory and nothing else. 2013 regs until June next year when they have to change to 2021 regs then the next step up in 2025. We can't afford these attitudes if we want to halt global warming. The changes we want would cut householders' heating costs as well as CO2 generation and avoid expensive retrofits.

Exemplar housing development for Elmswell to be considered

Council-owned land in Elmswell could be used for a development of 50 environmentally friendly low carbon homes in a scheme going before Cabinet members this month. We have campaigned for such a scheme since the 2019 election, so progress is welcome. However this is proposed on a valued public open space.

Council Tax Reduction (Working Age) Scheme

A formal consultation has commenced about revisions to The Council Tax Reduction Scheme which will come into effect on 1st April 2023. They allow a 100% maximum reduction for all legacy benefit households and introduce a simplified scheme for those in work and on Universal Credit based on seven income bands. Those earning less than £290 per month in addition to their Universal Credit would pay no council tax, those earning greater than £2900 per month would pay full council tax.

The changes will allow claims to be automated, based on the Universal Credit financial data delivering savings of between £75,000 and £150,000. At the moment, continual Universal Credit reassessments create council tax adjustments, administrative cost, customer confusion arrears and debt. The proposed banding reduces recalculation, provides clarity for people with fluctuating earnings and spreads council tax due over the year.

The cost of the scheme with 100% maximum reduction in Mid Suffolk is £2,494,807 across all preceptors and the additional cost of changing from the current scheme is £158.7k.

If you have queries, please phone me on 07756292320 or email me at: john.field@mid.suffolk.gov.uk