

## Little Blakenham

## Household Support Fund

Babergh & Mid Suffolk were allocated £50,000 each from this government provided fund to help protect the most vulnerable families from hardship. To make residents aware of the fund and how they could access the support MSDC updated our website, used social media, created a flyer with information and shared it with partners such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

However it is not easy to contact all residents in need and the distribution was largely to council tenants. We must find a way to provide help to wider groups from other funds as this difficult year progresses.

All funds were distributed by 30th September helping 134 households: Families with children, Pensioners, and other vulnerable households. 85 of these households contained children and an average payment of £746 per household was made. The breakdown was £3k on admin, £33k on rent arrears and £5k on historical rent arrears for temporary accommodation and £2k on bailiff costs arising from Council Tax arrears

## Council Rent Cap

The Govt. is consulting on the introduction of a changed council rent cap for next year. Normally Government permit rents to increase by up to CPI plus 1% per annum. I pointed out at budget time that next year this would result in rent increases of around 11%, difficult for our residents to manage in a year where power and food costs are rising dramatically. Government believes there is a strong case for making a temporary amendment to the CPI plus 1% policy to protect social housing tenants. They are seeking views on a cap of 3%, 5% and 7% and are also open to other proposals.

The district council is concerned, as it was when the government forced rents down by 1% per year for four years, about the impact on the total cumulative revenue into the Housing Revenue Account over 30 years. I believe that rents should be held down next year and could be adjusted in a couple of years' time to compensate.

## Parking Strategy

This week Cabinet approved a new parking strategy for Mid Suffolk and the recommendations it proposed, accepting that some recommendations may require full business cases to be approved by Cabinet at a later date. It also authorised the creation of a focused implementation plan.

This is Mid Suffolk's first parking strategy intended to guide us out to 2042, the result of a lot of investigation of the current issues. The report is comprehensive at some 335 pages if you include all evidence, consultation results and the Equality Impact Analysis. The 21-page strategy itself is reasonable digestible and the 75-page detailed findings quite comprehensive. There is then a further 77 pages detailing the recommendations, the basis on which they are constructed and a first estimate of the costs of implementation. 84 pages of analysis covering individual towns and issues leads to the final sections on consultations carried out and information gained. I can't pretend to have read all the detail yet, but we do have a document that lays out a lot of data, comprehensive enough to guide decisions, and to provide evidence to back them up.

## ***Car Charging***

The parking report does reveal that Mid Suffolk has few chargers installed for electric vehicles, four at the moment, more than at each Aldi or Tesco store but only just. We clearly need to do better! Hopefully the bid to the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles for charging points in 6 Mid Suffolk carparks will help. We also need to consider how some of the issues analysed will change. The need for car park signing for instance will perhaps disappear as in car navigation and display systems develop.

The current round of planning applications for employment facilities, at Port One and Gateway 14 for instance, are fitting around 20% of parking places with charging equipment so these locations are moving in the right direction.

## **Planning**

After a long series of Government proposals to change the planning system to speed up development the new Government appears even more intent on change. The latest proposal is to move grade 3b farmland into the “best and most versatile” category, making the solar farms in our area much less likely to proceed. Just what the impacts on Blakenham will be is impossible to judge.

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, a 10.88 year’s land supply of 3,266 units over the top!

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