

## **DISTRICT COUNCILLOR’S REPORT JULY 2024**

*June’s scheduled Full Council Meeting was cancelled due to the upcoming General Election on 4<sup>th</sup> July and other meetings were similarly cancelled or postponed.*

### **Public health update**

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New variants of Covid have started to spread across the UK. If you have been suffering with a stubborn cough or sore throat recently that just won’t go away, you may have caught one of these new strains of Covid named N FLiRT and LB.1. Some health experts have also suggested that FLiRT and LB.1 might be able evade immunity, which is why people who have been vaccinated are still getting ill.

“The FLiRT variant has specific changes in its spike protein that might make it spread more easily and dodge immunity from past infections or vaccines,” says Dr Malik an NHS and private GP at Pall Mall Medical.

“Similarly, the LB.1 variant has mutations that help it spread and possibly weaken the protection we get from previous immunity, making these variants different from earlier versions of the virus.

“The symptoms of the FLiRT and LB.1 variants are generally like those of earlier Covid-19 strains,” says Dr Malik. “Common symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, muscle or body aches, shortness of breath, headache, and a runny nose.

### **Bluetongue virus – free testing is now available**

The UK’s Chief Veterinary Officer is urging farmers to remain vigilant for bluetongue virus. Farmers should continue to monitor their animals

frequently for clinical signs and make sure their animals and land are registered so the government can locate animals in the event of an outbreak.

Free testing is now available for animals moving from the highest risk counties to live elsewhere in Great Britain or to be sold at a market within a high-risk county where there will be buyers from outside the high-risk counties.

<https://www.gov.uk/governmentpublications/bluetongue-get-free-testing-for-your-animals>

Bluetongue virus is primarily transmitted by biting midges and affects cattle, sheep, and other ruminants such as goats and deer, and camelids such as llamas and alpacas. The virus does not affect people or food safety.

Last month (23 May), the government set out how they will work with the farming industry to manage an outbreak of bluetongue virus in England this year.

## **River Gipping Trust**

I attended the Trust's annual meeting at Needham Market Community Centre on 14<sup>th</sup> June, having been invited to join them.

The first (guest) presentation was a brief history of the River Stour Trust, showing what can be done to encourage engagement by the public, such as trip boats, clean water areas for swimmers, canoeists, anglers, all of which is relevant to the Gipping.

The River Gipping Trust Restoration Manager then presented an overview of the restoration work along the River Gipping carried out by the Trust's volunteers during the year. They have been clearing riverside paths of vegetation to allow better access. They are gradually working towards clearing the vegetation immediately adjacent to the river to give better river views and wider paths. Himalayan Balsam is a major problem and they want to cut as much down as possible before the seedpods burst and allow more plants to establish.

They described the use of “stop planks” to provide a method of temporarily damming the canal off either to drain a limited section of canal for scheduled engineering work, or in an emergency (such as a breach or structure failure) to limit the loss of water. Apparently the canal at Great Blakenham is leaking and the Trust will need to stop the water flow in order to investigate but the repairs may take some time.

## **Bees’ Needs Week – update**

This year, Bees’ Needs Week (8 – 14 July) makes a call on the public to take five simple actions to help pollinators. To sustain bee populations, people can:

- Grow more flowers, shrubs and trees
- Let patches of garden and land grow wild
- Cut grass less often
- Don’t disturb insect, nest and hibernation spots
- Think carefully about whether to use insecticides

Individuals can also get involved by completing Flower-Insect-Timed (FIT) counts. FIT counts can be done anywhere, including gardens and parks, any time from April to September. For more information, read the Pollinator Monitoring Scheme instructions (<https://ukpoms.org.uk/fit-counts>) on how to submit a FIT count.

## **£1.5 Million Fund to Enhance Stowmarket Town Centre**

The Stowmarket Town Centre Gateway Fund is made possible thanks to the council’s income from its investment in the Gateway 14 Business Park. It will be working with landlords to bring under-utilised

properties, including empty shops back into use – buying, renting or refurbishing them.

The aim is to increase arts and cultural experiences, tourism and community activities in the town, encouraging retail opportunities, small businesses and leisure and food and drink activities.

This fund will be discussed at the next Cabinet meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> July.

## **Changes to eligibility regulations for housing and homelessness assistance – reminder**

On 7 June, minor changes came into effect to housing regulations that determine who is eligible for an allocation of social housing and homelessness assistance.

Two additional groups who will now be eligible The groups are (i) those who have their No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition lifted by the Home Office and (ii) victims of Transnational Marriage Abandonment (TMA). Neither group is required to satisfy the Habitual Residence Test.

Councils will need to continue to check the eligibility of anyone who presents as homeless following the usual process as set out in guidance.

## **Housing Ombudsman and Regulator of Social Housing – Memorandum of Understanding**

Today (10 July), the [Housing Ombudsman and Regulator of Social Housing published a new Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#), setting out how the two organisations will continue to work with one another. The MoU reflects their new powers under the Social Housing Regulation Act.

Both bodies are committed to strengthening the accountability of social landlords for providing safe homes, quality services and treating tenants with respect.

The updated Memorandum sets out a new framework of communication, cooperation and exchange of information between the regulator and the Ombudsman, and explains how each will work together to deliver their respective roles.

Under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, the Memorandum is now a statutory document.

## **Rural services network newsletter – July 2024**

### **Rural housing seminar June 24:**

**Martin Collett, Chief Executive of [English Rural Housing Association](#)**, set the stage with a detailed analysis of the current political party manifestos through a rural housing lens. Martin emphasised the need for rural communities to find their voice in advocating for well-designed, affordable homes.

**Patrick Merton-Jones, External Affairs Manager at the [National Housing Federation](#)**, presented a compelling argument for a long-term housing plan tailored to rural needs. Patrick revealed startling statistics, such as the 20% increase in housing waiting lists in rural areas from 2020 to 2023.

**Tom Chance, Chief Executive of the [Community Land Trust Network](#)**, explored the role of community-led development in addressing rural housing needs. Tom provided insights into how Community Land Trusts (CLTs) and other not-for-profit organisations can spearhead affordable housing projects.

## The Rural Funding Digest

(<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-funding-digest-july-2024>)

- details a large number of grants, some described below:

### **Project Viability & Project Development Grants – the Architectural Heritage Fund**

The Fund is offering grants of up to £15,000 to help assess the viability of historic building projects, and up to £20,000 towards development work to progress plans for historic buildings.

- Project Viability Grants:
- Project Development Grants. Applications are assessed at monthly grant decision meetings. This grant programme is supported by funding from Historic England.

[England | The Architectural Heritage Fund \(ahfund.org.uk\)](https://ahfund.org.uk)

### **Neighbourhood Planning Grant Funding – Locality**

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) have extended support for Neighbourhood Planning for a seventh year (2024/2025). The Neighbourhood Planning Support Programme will continue to offer grants and Technical Support packages and is currently open for applications. As follows:

- If you're working on a neighbourhood plan or neighbourhood development order, you can apply for grant funding of up to £10,000. Further grant funding is available to groups meeting certain criteria.
- If you're facing complex issues such as allocating sites for development, you can apply for Technical Support where a specialist advisor will support you with specific issues or assessments.

[Home - Locality Neighbourhood Planning](#)

## **DHSC Community Automated External Defibrillator (AED) fund**

Organisations across England are invited to bid for a share of £1 million of government funding to buy life-saving defibrillators for community spaces like town halls, local parks or post offices. The fund will support provision of 2000 AED's. These will be distributed across England during 2023-2024, supporting any organisation based in England that is not eligible for the current Department of Education AED programme. The funding for the scheme is based on a first come first served basis. The funding will be allocated on the following basis:

- 100 applications will be selected by DHSC to receive a fully funded AED - selection is based on areas that are most in need of AED throughout England. Applicants will be advised in mid October and units shipped in mid November.
- 1900 applications will receive partial DHSC funding for an AED - organisations will be required to provide their own match funding of c.£750.

The closing date for applications is 21 September 2024 – or once all the funding has been allocated.

[DHSC Community Automated External Defibrillator \(AED\) Fund - GOV-UK Find a grant \(find-government-grants.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/find-a-grant)

## **Community Transport Grants – Motability**

Through this new grant programme Motability aim to help charities and organisations to make an immediate impact for disabled people, by awarding funding to develop, expand and improve community transport options. The programme is focussed on:

- Funding support for staff or volunteer training and costs.
- Funding to increase the number of vehicles available in the community to help organisations support disabled people.
- Funding local, regional, or national initiatives to increase awareness of community transport and influence its inclusion in transport strategy and policy.
- Funding to schemes, programmes and initiatives that already exist, and who provide best practice solutions, but need further support to remain operational or scale up the service they can provide to help more disabled people.

Charities and organisations working in the community transport sector can apply for grants from £100,000 to £4 million at any point before March 2025.

[Charitable Grants | Community Transport Grant | Motability](#)

### **Community Ownership Fund – Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities**

This fund helps community groups buy or renovate assets that would otherwise be lost to the community.

Assets are venues and meeting spaces used by the local community, such as:

- community centres
- cinemas and theatres
- galleries
- museums
- music venues
- parks
- post office buildings
- pubs
- shops
- sporting and leisure facilities

Assets can be at risk of being lost to the community from:

- closure or end of lease
- neglect or dereliction
- an unsustainable current business model



- being for sale
- being listed for disposal
- being part of a community asset transfer

The asset must offer value to local people. You must be able to run it sustainably for the long term.

The final round of the Community Ownership Fund takes place this year. There are two bidding windows to allocate remaining funding. Window 1 was open until 10 April 2024.

Window 2 was due to open in late May. However, this has been paused during the current pre-election period.

### **FCC Community Action Fund**

The FCC Community Action Fund provides grants of between £2,000 and £100,000 to not-for-profit organisations for amenity projects eligible under Object D of the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF).

The following types of organisation can apply:

- Registered Charity which operates a community facility
- A Church or Parochial Church Council
- A Parish or Town Council or a Management Committee or User Association acting on behalf of a Parish or Town Council
- A Local Authority
- A CASC Registered Sports Club

Only applications for projects sited within 10 miles of an eligible FCC Environment waste facility can be accepted, you can check if you are located near an eligible site on their website.

The closing date for the next round of applications is 4 September 2024.

[FCC Community Action Fund / FCC \(fcccommunitiesfoundation.org.uk\)](https://fcccommunitiesfoundation.org.uk)

### **Football Foundation grants**

The Football Foundation provides grants for building or refurbishing grassroots facilities, such as changing rooms, 3G pitches, fencing,

portable floodlights, pitch improvements and clubhouse refurbishment. The Fund is available to football clubs, schools, councils and local sports associations and gives grants for projects that:

- Improve facilities for football and other sport in local communities.
- Sustain or increase participation amongst children and adults, regardless of background age, or ability.
- Help children and adults to develop their physical, mental, social and moral capacities through regular participation in sport.

Grants are available for between £10,000 and £500,000.

*Adrienne Marriott*  
*Blakenham District Councillor*  
*Updated*  
*11/07/24*