

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT SEPTEMBER 2024

Councils to host Call for land summit in September

Councils are putting landowners in touch with organisations that can help them improve their land for wildlife and nature

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are hosting a free event in September for local landowners in the districts to help put them in touch with organisations that can support them in managing their land better for wildlife.

Call for land summit attendees include environmental organisations working across both Babergh and Mid Suffolk, such as the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission, among others.

They will be able to offer landowners advice, support, funding and resources to help ensure their land best supports our native wildlife. This could be tree planting, hedge planting, meadow creation or allowing land to develop naturally.

The summit will take place at The Mix in Stowmarket on 5 September between 10am-2pm and the event is now sold out.

Attendees will benefit from presentations, landowner case studies, as well as networking opportunities.

The councils have already helped put almost 40 landowners in Babergh and Mid Suffolk in touch with organisations that can help them with this work.

Additional funding approved to allow vulnerable residents to stay in their own homes

Babergh and Mid Suffolk cabinets agreed to increase funding to support more households to carry out home adaptations for family members with a disability, long term illness or change in health. The enhanced grants include doubling minor adaptation grant limits and introducing offers of a 'top up' of up to £20,000 above to the national disabled facilities grant limit.

Independent Living Service grants available include:

- repairs adaptations grant up to £10,000
- minor adaptations grant - for residents living with dementia, to help cope with the challenges of living at home for those facing terminal illness or end of life care increased from £7500 to up to £15,000
- discretionary relocation grant up to £7,500
- discretionary disabled facilities grant (top up grant) of £20,000

Remediating unsafe buildings

The Deputy Prime Minister, Rt Hon Angela Rayner, and Building Safety Minister, Rushanara Ali MP, set out clear expectations for regulators and partners to increase the pace of remediating unsafe buildings at a roundtable convened yesterday (28 August).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fixing-unsafe-buildings-must-be-faster-deputy-prime-minister-tells-roundtable-of-regulators-and-partners>.

The Deputy Prime Minister set out her priorities – speeding up the remediation of buildings, and ensuring that people are safe in buildings undergoing remediation.

Household Support Fund extended six months

The government has today (2 September) announced an extension to the Household Support Fund for the next six months to support struggling households with bills and essential costs.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-support-extended-to-help-struggling-households-with-bills-and-essential-costs-over-winter>

The £421 million extension gives certainty to councils in England over the winter months – up until April 2025 – as they work to help those struggling with the cost of energy, food, and water.

Many councils also use the funding beyond emergency support, including working with local charities and community groups to provide residents with key appliances, school uniforms, cookery classes, and items to improve energy efficiency in the home.

Pensioners and others struggling to heat their homes or afford other essential items over the colder months should contact their council to see what support may be available to them. Details on the latest scheme will be communicated in the coming weeks.

Free childcare application – deadline soon

The Department for Education (DfE) is reminding eligible working parents in England who are making childcare arrangements for September, that they need to apply by 31 August for:

- 15 hours childcare for children aged nine months until three years old
- 30 hours childcare for children aged three or four-year-old.

Parents can check their eligibility on the Childcare Choices website <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/guidance-and-resources>

DfE has provided key messaging and resources in the revised Childcare Choices partner communications toolkit.

Public health update

Reminder: Flu vaccination programme 2024 to 2025

On 16 August, the UK Health Security Agency published guidance on the different types of flu vaccines available for the 2024 to 2025 flu season and the clinical risk groups that they apply to - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccines-for-the-current-season>

There is additional guidance available which explains to patients how they can help protect themselves and their children against flu this winter. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-who-should-have-it-this-winter-and-why>

It includes information for children, eligible adults and pregnant women, and details why it's very important that people at increased risk from flu, or who care for someone vulnerable, to have their free vaccination every year.

Reminder: Respiratory syncytial virus vaccine toolkits

On 13 August, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) highlighted the

benefits that the new respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccination programme - https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-rsv-vaccine-could-prevent-5000-infant-hospitalisations#_ftn1

is expected to bring. The programme will be introduced from September for pregnant women and older adults as they turn 75.

A recent detailed analysis estimated that the new programme could typically prevent 5,000 hospitalisations and 15,000 emergency department attendances for infants.

Whooping cough infections continue to rise

On 8th August the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) published new whooping cough data showing cases rising to over 10,000.

In response to increasing case numbers, UKHSA is reminding mums-to-be to get protected against whooping cough so that their young baby has protection from birth against this disease, and to ask their midwife if they are unsure.

UKHSA is also urging parents to check that their children are vaccinated against whooping cough, which is offered to all infants at 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age (as part of the 6-in-1 combination vaccine) with an additional dose included in the pre-school booster vaccine.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

Fuel poverty in England report published

The Committee on Fuel Poverty published its annual report on 28th August. The committee monitors and provides independent, expert advice on government's strategy to improve the energy efficiency of fuel poor homes in England to make them more affordable to heat.

Data in the report shows that fuel poverty in England is flatlining, not falling and the report makes a number of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of fuel poverty programmes -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fuel-poverty-has-not-fallen-to-any-meaningful-extent-in-5-years>.

Water bill compensation

On 12th August the government published new proposals to the Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS) to improve baseline customer service standards and protection in the water and sewerage sector.

The proposals cover 3 key areas in relation to the scheme:

- Uprating payment amounts
- Improving and clarifying existing standards within the scheme
- Introducing additional standards which are not at present a statutory provision of the scheme

This is subject to an 8-week consultation which runs until 7 October.

Consultation:

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/water-affordability-and-consumers/consultation-on-updating-the-guaranteed-standards/consultation/intro/>

MSDC Suffolk Recycles campaign

Use Your Loaf

<https://www.foodsavvy.org.uk/use-your-loaf>

MSDC's latest Food Savvy campaign is focusing on reducing wasted bread. National research shows that a whopping 25 million slices of bread are wasted in the UK every day. That's a lot of bread!

The Use Your Loaf campaign aims to highlight this serious problem and find solutions. It is packed with tips and advice on how to use up stale bread, store bread correctly and freeze it for later use. With lots of fun recipe ideas including stale bread pasta from local chef Rowen Halstead.

Batteries and electrical fires

Every year, hundreds of fires occur across the waste and recycling sector in the UK. This can cause damage to services and equipment and most importantly can put people in danger.

The majority of fires are caused by batteries which have been wrongly placed in rubbish or recycling bins. Batteries can be damaged during the collection and treatment process and this can cause some batteries, particularly lithium-based, to explode or ignite.

Many products, including vapes, contain hidden batteries that cannot be easily removed, so people can easily discard them without realising the possible consequences. Monitoring shows that thousands of vapes are placed in Suffolk's recycling bins every week. Some small fires, which fortunately were contained and rapidly dealt with, have already occurred.

Six ways to reduce battery waste and reduce fire risk

1. Use rechargeable batteries where possible to reduce battery waste

2. Donate unwanted battery-powered electricals or resell them rather than throwing items away
3. Never put batteries in normal rubbish or recycling bins
4. Recycle batteries at large stores or recycling centres
5. Remove batteries from broken devices if safe to do so and recycle the device and battery separately
6. If you can't safely remove the battery, recycle the device with the battery inside at an electrical recycling point

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03/09/24*