

## District councillor's report, April 2014

### 1. How to organise community events

An inspirational day of talks, forums and activities has been arranged for anyone who wants to develop the towns and villages where they live.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' Communities Team has organised two free events where people can come along and find out how to organise activities such as a community festival, events and activities for the local village hall, recruit new volunteers, start a community group or run a sports club.

The Community Roadshows will be a jam-packed day including inspirational speakers talking about community success stories, informal forums to discuss ideas and share best practice and an information market with community professionals on hand to tell you about their work.

As well as providing no shortage of ideas, toolkits will be provided, full of information, contacts and ideas on how to get your ideas off the ground.

The first roadshow will take place on **Saturday 17 May**, 10am-12.30pm or 1.30pm-4pm at Stutton Village Hall, Manningtree Road, Stutton, IP9 2TA.

Some of the topics that will be covered on the day by guest speakers include how to start a volunteer group, help on applying for funding and funding forms explained, how to apply for money from the Section 106 pot and the importance of promotion online.

On top of this full day of activities, there will also be an opportunity for people to apply for on the spot speed-funding for any ideas they may have to help kick start them. These sessions will run between 12.30pm-2pm.

The idea behind these events is to encourage and help people put on more events and be more active in the village or towns in which they live. There are so many things that people could do – such as setting up their own Digital Cinema Club, organising a festival or community event, taking on the management of a local green space or setting up a sports club for young people within the village.

The second roadshow will take place in September at Woolpit Village Hall.

Details about this event will follow later in the year.

To find out more, or to book your place on the event, contact Jo Beever in the Communities Team by emailing: [jo.beever@midsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:jo.beever@midsuffolk.gov.uk) or 01449 724654.

## 2. Babergh and Mid Suffolk – great places to live!

Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk have been placed in the top 50 rural areas to live across the UK in the latest Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey.

Both districts featured in a national survey that monitors the quality of life in rural areas and announces the best places to live in the UK - with Mid Suffolk ranking as the 18th best nationally (compared with 34<sup>th</sup> the previous year), as well as being highest placed in Suffolk.

Councillor Derrick Haley, Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council, said "Of course, the survey is just proof that what all of our residents already know - Mid Suffolk is a great place to live and work".

The survey tracks where living standards are highest in Great Britain by taking a wide range of factors into account, including residents' health and life expectancy, crime rate, weather, employment, school results, broadband access, and personal wellbeing. The survey also examines all 119 rural local authority districts and is based on data at local authority district level.

## 3. Proposal to install solar panels on Council housing

Mid Suffolk's Executive Committee is to decide on the business case for this in April. The proposal is to secure Public Works Loan Board loans to fund the installation of solar panels in order to:

Provide a guaranteed income stream to the Council's General Fund for the next 20 years, deriving income from the Government-backed 'Feed in Tariff' (FiT) framework, which makes payments to individuals, organisations and businesses that invest in renewable technologies and export the generated electricity to the National Grid. The FiTs are fixed, guaranteed for 20 years and linked to inflation. Modern solar panels are likely to last longer than 20 years and continue to operate relatively efficiently for some time after the loans would be paid off. The Committee report will present a breakdown of the investment required and expected returns for each Council to enable independent decisions to be made.

An initial screening survey has identified 2,150 Council houses (of which 900 are in Mid Suffolk) that are potentially suitable. Details of the factors which will determine the final number of properties are given below, but the business case is financially profitable on a "per property" basis.

The benefits would be to:

- Make a significant contribution to the Councils' stated objective of alleviating fuel poverty. Under the scheme, Council tenants would be able to use the electricity generated by the solar panels on their roofs. 57% of Council properties house residents in receipt of Housing Benefit and as a proxy indicator of fuel poverty, this would mean assisting approximately 1,200 homes with known financial issues.

- Make a significant contribution to achieving the Councils' stated objective of protecting the environment by securing the removal of 39,000 tonnes of Carbon dioxide from the National Grid mix over the lifetime of the scheme.

The following are some key messages about the proposed scheme, which you may find helpful if you do receive enquiries from your constituents:

- i. If approved, we would hope to begin installing solar panels in May-June.
- ii. The aim of the programme is to generate income to maintain Council services, and to save both energy and the environment by generating electricity from the sun rather than using fossil fuels.
- iii. Unfortunately, it will only be possible to fit solar panels to a limited number of homes due to several technical constraints including:
  - the direction that homes face (which determines how much sunlight it gets throughout the day - the closer this is to south the better);
  - the pitch of the roof;
  - any excessive shading from trees or buildings; and
  - the capacity of the local electricity grid to receive all of the power generated from all the properties fitted with solar panels in the area.
- iii. We have already identified those homes which might be suitable. However, if the scheme goes ahead, a company will need to carry out surveys on our behalf to check each property individually. If a home is suitable, we will write to the occupier in due course to provide more information.
- iv. Residents would benefit through a reduction in their annual electricity bills of an average of £150 per year (depending on how much electricity they use).
- v. While we recognise that only a limited number of residents can benefit from this scheme, we are always looking at alternative ways to find greener energy solutions and save residents money. Examples include the programme of installing air source heat pumps, loft and wall installation.

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