



## Stonham Ward

March 2021

### Community testing

1 in 3 people who have Covid-19 do not have symptoms and may be unwittingly spreading the virus to other people without knowing. To tackle this, Suffolk has introduced community testing (also known as lateral flow testing or rapid testing) for those who are unable to work from home. A number of community testing centres have recently opened across Mid Suffolk, including sites in Stowmarket, Elmswell and Needham Market. To find out more, or to make an appointment go to [the Suffolk County Council website](#).

### Councils pledge to provide further financial support for struggling households

Thousands of households across Mid Suffolk will be eligible for a reduction in their council tax bill after councillors approved further support for residents facing financial difficulties due to Covid-19.

Last year, the Government announced a new Hardship Fund to help households already in receipt of means-tested working age Local Council Tax Support (LCTS). This enabled a reduction of up to £150 to be automatically applied to council tax bills for these households – ensuring the districts' most financially vulnerable residents had nothing to pay in 2020/21.

Councils were required to hold back enough Hardship Fund to make this same relief available to any new customers who claimed LCTS throughout the council tax year. However, as the year end approaches, there is still some funding remaining and so the councils have taken the decision to reduce council tax bills even more.

Mid Suffolk councillors unanimously approved an amendment to the existing Hardship Fund, to enable the maximum amount of funding to be allocated to working age council taxpayers most in need of support, at its Cabinet meeting.

MSDC will now award further Hardship Relief to eligible residents who have received LCTS against their council tax liability for 2020/21. Households who are affected will automatically receive an adjusted bill – there is no requirement to apply.

Any Hardship Fund remaining, after applying the additional award, will be used to fund Discretionary Financial Assistance for residents in exceptional circumstances. Further information about this support can be found on [Mid Suffolk District Council's website](#).

Mid Suffolk District Council cabinet member for Finance, Cllr John Whitehead commented:

“It is quite clear that Covid-19, and its impact, will be felt for some time to come. We therefore welcome the generous funding provided by the government as this financial support will provide a lifeline to struggling households. Beyond those that we're already aware of, we want to help



## **Stonham Ward**

all residents who genuinely need it. If your household income has reduced, you may be entitled to a reduction in your council tax bill and information on this, and other support, is available on our website.”

Residents whose financial circumstances have been affected by the coronavirus can contact the [Suffolk Advice and Support Service](#) on **0800 068 3131** for free confidential advice on one-off grants, rent arrears, mortgages, credit cards or other debts. The service, launched in response to Covid-19, can also help with access to food and other coronavirus related concerns.

### **Covid support grants for businesses**

There are several business support grants available which cover different local and national lockdown periods. For businesses mandated to close (including those in retail, leisure and hospitality) that have applied and received a lockdown grant since November 2020, our plan is to automatically pay additional grants following pre-payment checks.

However, for businesses that may be eligible but have not heard from us, or are yet to apply for any grants, we are encouraging them to find out more and to submit an application form as soon as possible. Further information about all the covid business support grants can be found on [our grant funding schemes webpage](#)

### **Green light for community car park**

Collaboration between councils, the NHS and a local housing developer is paving the way for a new community car park – providing parking for medical staff and patients attending Covid vaccination appointments.

Land adjoining Woolpit Health Centre is being gifted to Mid Suffolk District Council by Barratt and David Wilson Homes, who are currently building new homes in the village.

Proposals for this to be used as a community car park have been accelerated in response to a growing demand for parking while the health centre is used to administer the COVID-19 vaccination.

Woolpit was one of the first COVID vaccination sites in Suffolk and has already administered thousands of vaccinations at its temporary home at Woolpit Business Park. However, this location will return to its original use once lockdown restrictions begin to ease, and vaccinations will instead be carried out at Woolpit Health Centre, which is still providing routine GP services to patients.



## **Stonham Ward**

This has created a need for the centre to be easily accessible by those attending vaccination appointments, including elderly and vulnerable residents prioritised for the vaccine.

Mid Suffolk District Council is working in partnership with the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Suffolk County Council, Woolpit Parish Council, and housing developer Barratt and David Wilson Homes on proposals for a new community car park to accommodate increased visitor numbers to the surgery during the pandemic.

Work on the first stage of the project, linking the land to the health centre's existing car park, will begin shortly. This will involve the removal of a short section of hedgerow that presently separates the areas, once an inspection has been carried out to assess the presence of wildlife and nesting birds.

Although there are significant drainage and resurfacing works to be undertaken, it is hoped the car park will be fully operational in the Summer – and additional updates on this will be provided as plans progress. Until completion, patients should continue to walk or cycle to the surgery, where possible, to increase the availability of spaces for those with limited mobility.

Plans for the long-term community use of the car park are currently being explored with Woolpit Parish Council, who have lent their support to the project.

Cllr David Burn, Mid Suffolk District Council's cabinet member for planning, commented: "I would like to thank all those involved in this collaborative project, including Barratt and David Wilson Homes, the CCG, Suffolk County Council and Woolpit Parish Council. Their help is enabling us to expedite plans for a much-needed community car park – ensuring parking spaces are available for critical medical staff and vulnerable residents who are attending their vaccination appointment."

Dr Ed Garratt, Chief Executive of West Suffolk CCG, said: "We believe the construction of this new car park will really increase ease of access for many people to the health centre. We know the local communities really value this health centre facility and the CCG is pleased to have been involved in supporting the development of plans. We look forward to continuing our work with partners."

Simon Wood, Managing Director at Barratt and David Wilson Homes Eastern Counties, said: "We're thrilled to support Woolpit Health Centre as part of our upcoming Abbots Green development and will look forward to enhancing the facility's car park to support the demand for additional parking for the Covid-19 vaccination centre."

"As a leading homebuilder, it's our responsibility to support the areas in which we build with new facilities and services and the health centre will continue to be a valuable asset for new and existing residents in the village."



## **Stonham Ward**

The council is reviewing car parking at other vaccination sites in the district, and has already pledged to offer free parking for patients being vaccinated at The Mix in Stowmarket.

At present, the COVID vaccine is being offered to people most at risk from coronavirus – and the NHS will contact Mid Suffolk residents when it is their turn to be vaccinated.

### **Budget to ‘supercharge’ district’s recovery**

Councillors have agreed Mid Suffolk District Council’s budget for 2021/22 – keeping council tax low while ‘supercharging’ the district’s post-Covid recovery.

The budget agreed at last night’s Full Council increases Mid Suffolk’s share of council tax by just 1.66%. The equivalent of only 23p a month (£2.80 a year) for an average Band D property.

The council recognises the financial challenges facing many residents and local employers as a result of the pandemic. The money raised through the council tax increase is therefore being ring-fenced to provide direct support for businesses hardest hit by the pandemic.

Councillors also heard how, thanks to wise financial management and income generation, Mid Suffolk is now also in a position to invest an additional £4m into the district’s recovery.

This money will be invested in the local economy, housing, the wellbeing of residents, and in its communities – with a cross-party approach adopted to develop recommendations to Mid Suffolk Cabinet for its use.

Mid Suffolk District Council leader Cllr Suzie Morley said:

“This is a time to be investing in our district to ensure it doesn’t just swiftly bounce back from the devastating impacts of the Covid pandemic. But, is also able to thrive – that we provide bright and healthy futures for our residents and communities.

“We must judge ourselves by how we look after the most vulnerable in our district. So, it is fantastic that we are now able to ‘supercharge’ our investment into our district with this additional commitment.”

In addition to further investment in tackling climate change & enhanced biodiversity, the council has pledged to:

- build the affordable & sustainable homes people need
- invest in people’s physical & mental health

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## Stonham Ward

- support the recovery & growth of the local economy
- strengthen & enable civic pride, community spirit & empowered local democracy

Mid Suffolk District Council cabinet member for Finance, Cllr John Whitehead said:

“This budget has been prepared during one of the most challenging and uncertain times due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on the council’s finances, staff, residents and local economy.

“The council has played a significant role in responding to the pandemic, supporting businesses and the most vulnerable in our communities, as well as running essential services. And, we will continue to play a crucial role in the district’s recovery, with our residents continuing to face challenges over coming months and years.

“Thanks to consistent leadership and wise management of public funds over many years. For example, the creation of CIFCO and the income generated by our investment in commercial property, our finances remain in a robust position for 2021/22. This means we can keep our share of council tax low, but still deliver our vision to create great communities with bright and healthy futures that everyone is proud to call home.”

Ahead of next year’s council tax bills landing on doormats, residents can check their details and let the council know of any changes 24/7 by [signing up for an online account](#).

Through an online account, residents can opt for paperless billing, check their balance, see instalments, update their details and see council tax reduction and housing benefit claim information as well as viewing bills online.

## CIFCO portfolio nears completion

Property investment company CIFCO Capital Ltd is set to increase the £1.5m it has already ploughed back into council services so far this year – with the recent purchase of a Coventry trade park.

The Pilot Trade Centre in Coventry – bought for £5.54m– is the 19<sup>th</sup> property to be added to CIFCO’s portfolio and is set to bring in approximately £300k a year in rent.

CIFCO was established jointly by Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils in 2017 to generate income through property investment to offset reductions in funding from central Government.

The returns received from CIFCO then meet the councils’ loan repayments, with extra income on top ploughed back into council services.



## **Stonham Ward**

Since its launch, CIFCO has brought in £4.5m of net income to the councils, £1.5m of that the first three quarters of this year alone, at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has significantly affected other 'traditional' income streams.

Mid Suffolk District Council leader Cllr Suzie Morley said: "The virus has affected almost every business, but it is testament to CIFCO's careful risk management and expertise in balancing its portfolio, that rent collection levels remain above industry averages and repayments continue to be made in full.

"The income from CIFCO's completed portfolio will be invaluable in supporting the district's post-Covid recovery, while its portfolio provides a legacy of properties for the benefit of residents for years to come."

The remainder of the £100m investment agreed by councillors (approximately £15m) is due to be completed in coming weeks.

You can find out more about CIFCO and its portfolio at [cifcocapital.com](http://cifcocapital.com)

## **Councils confirm support for Freeport East**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have confirmed their support for Freeport East. The bid, which includes Gateway 14 in Stowmarket, has been formally submitted to Government by Hutchinson Ports.

[Read the full story](#)

## **An extra £3m for warmer, greener Suffolk homes**

More Suffolk residents, including those in Mid Suffolk, are set to benefit from Government Green Homes Grants thanks to a further successful bid for £3m funding by a Suffolk consortium of local authorities.

This funding adds to a previous [award of £1m secured last year](#).

The funding, provided by the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, will provide energy efficiency measures for owner occupiers of properties with poor energy performance ratings.

Partner local authorities are already working on delivering five projects by March 2021, and have a completion deadline of September for the five new schemes. These are external

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## Stonham Ward

wall insulation of 100 park homes in West Suffolk, 150 park homes in East Suffolk, and 70 Flagship Group properties, insulation and air source heat pumps on 100 homes in Babergh and Mid Suffolk, and internal wall insulation for 10 properties through Leiston Net Zero/EDF.

[The Greener Homes scheme](#), which is designed to help make homes more energy efficient, is also available direct to homeowners, as well as to councils, offering vouchers up to £5000 to households to get energy saving work done. The scheme is open until March 2022.

Cllr John Griffiths, Leader of West Suffolk Council, which led the consortium bid, said,

“I am delighted to see how our track record on working together across Suffolk on the climate emergency is helping to reduce fuel bills for more of our residents.

“West Suffolk alone has some 550 park homes, a type of housing with generally poor insulation and which occupiers can sometimes struggle to heat. The window for making these bids, and for delivering the projects is extremely tight, but by close collaboration and by partners having schemes ready, we were able to secure this very welcome funding.

“This opportunity is also available direct to householders, and information on how to go about benefitting is on [the Green Suffolk website](#). By making your homes more energy efficient, you could be warmer, save on fuel bills and, of course, do your part in working towards a carbon neutral Suffolk by 2030.”

The project bided for by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils as part of the £3m, is to retrofit 100 socially rented properties with insulation and renewable heating. This will increase the remit of a planned retrofit scheme.

Measures will comprise external wall insulation, loft insulation top ups and air source heat pumps. The council expects an average cost per property of £11,000, of which BMS will contribute £6,000.

Property eligibility will be determined by identifying properties with eligible EPC ratings via BMS’s asset database and verifying these against Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) records.

Household eligibility will be determined using means tested benefits from tenancy details.

Cllr Suzie Morley, Mid Suffolk District Council Leader, said:

“This funding is great news for our tenants and will play an important role in helping to achieve our carbon neutral ambitions.



## **Stonham Ward**

“Ensuring our housing stock is of a high standard and provides safe, warm and secure places to live remains our priority. We are committed to investigating further funding to improve our homes, in order to reduce our carbon emissions and support the wellbeing of our community in the place we’re proud to call home.”

### **Everyone will benefit from Census 2021**

Households across Mid Suffolk will be asked to take part in Census 2021 this spring. The census, run by the Office for National Statistics, is a once-in-a-decade survey that gives us the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales. It has been carried out every ten years since 1801, with the exception of 1941.

Understanding the needs of the nation helps everyone from central government to organisations, such as councils and health authorities, plan and fund public services across England and Wales. Census outputs inform where billions of pounds of public funding is spent on services like transport, education and health – on cycle routes, schools and dental surgeries.

Information from the census is also important in helping lots of other people and organisations do their work.

Charities and voluntary organisations often use it as evidence to get funding. It helps businesses to understand their customers and, for example, decide where to open new shops. Plus, those doing research, like university students and people looking into their family history, use census data. It provides important information on population diversity, allowing organisations to know whether they are meeting their responsibilities and triggering action where necessary.

Census 2021 will be the first run predominantly online, with households receiving a letter with a unique access code, allowing them to complete the questionnaire on their computers, phones or tablets.

“The census provides a unique snapshot of our communities,” Iain Bell, deputy national statistician at Office for National Statistics, said. “It benefits everyone. Based on the information you give, it ensures millions of pounds are invested in emergency services, mental health care, school places, hospital beds, houses, roads, GP’s and dentist’s services.

“No-one should miss out. Everyone can complete on online with a new search-as-you-type ability and paper forms for those who need them.”

Census day will be on March 21, but households will soon receive letters with online codes explaining how they can take part. The census will include questions about your sex, age,





## **Stonham Ward**

work, health, education, household size and ethnicity. And, for the first time, there will be a question asking people whether they have served in the armed forces, as well as voluntary questions for those aged 16 and over on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Results will be available within 12 months, although personal records will be locked away for 100 years, kept safe for future generations.

[Find more information and advice on how to answer the questions on the census.gov.uk website.](https://www.census.gov.uk)

### **Councillors vote to refuse Needham Market development**

Mid Suffolk District Council recently refused outline planning permission for 279 homes to be built in Needham Market, citing concerns over the development's location, accessibility and impact on landscape.

Plans for land to the north west side of Barking Road were considered at today's planning committee meeting, held virtually to ensure public safety during the current coronavirus outbreak.

Following input from the planning officer, applicant and councillors – and subsequent debate – the committee voted unanimously in favour of refusing outline planning permission for the scheme.

Reasons cited included a risk of development that was not well integrated or compatible with Needham Market because of the site's location in countryside outside of the town's settlement boundary.

Inadequate footpath and cycleway connectivity from the development to Needham Market would also limit sustainable transport options for residents, which is at odds with the council's ongoing ambition to address climate change.

Potential harm to rural landscape from proposals also influenced the committee's decision, given the site's prominent and elevated position and its role in providing a landscape buffer between Needham Market and neighbouring village Barking. In addition, concerns were raised about the loss of good agricultural land, without adequate justification, if the site were to be developed.

The location of the development's entrance within a flood zone was another significant reason for refusal, after planning officers voiced fears about access to the site in the event of flooding. This view was supported by Suffolk County Council and the Environment Agency, who objected to the scheme on this basis.



## **Stonham Ward**

Proposals had also been met with opposition from local residents and both Needham Market Town Council and Barking Parish Council.

Cllr Matthew Hicks, Chair of Mid Suffolk District Council's Development Control Committee A said:

"We want to ensure that the right properties are built in the right places in Mid Suffolk and after much consideration our committee reached a decision that this development would not fulfil this aim - reflecting the view of many local residents.

"Whilst I commend the developer for offering a substantial amount of affordable housing, the benefits of proposals don't outweigh the considerable harm of this application to the rural landscape and agricultural land, or justify development on countryside outside of Needham Market's settlement boundary.

"Our committee also had great concerns about the site's sole access point being located within a flood zone and the danger this could pose in the event of flooding."

Also during the meeting, the committee voted by six to one to approve reserved matters (subject to conditions), outlining final details of a development of 190 new homes in Old Norwich Road, Whitton.

Plans for the site significantly evolved following discussions between Whitton Parish Council, ward members and developer Bellway Homes to achieve an amicable outcome for the local community, after councillors voted to defer the application last month. Revisions including the removal of triple parking on all plots but one, changes to layout to reduce the impact of the development on neighbouring residents, and improvements to cycleways were subsequently made to address issues previously raised by the committee.

When approving the reserved matters, committee members requested that the council, applicant and Suffolk County Council work collaboratively to explore the significant surface water drainage issues raised by the community, with a view to potentially resolving the situation. The introduction of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology to improve monitoring of misuse of the nearby bus gate by drivers will also be investigated.

## **Councils help combat holiday hunger**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have continued to fund a joint initiative offering food and activities for families in need during the school holidays.



## Stonham Ward

[Read the full story](#)

### Plug in Suffolk

Plug in Suffolk is now providing grants for the installation of Electric Vehicle charging points at non-profit locations such as community centres, parish council car parks and village halls. Visit [Green Suffolk's website](#) or contact Suffolk County Council's environment strategy officer [Peter Frost](#) to find out more about the funding.

### The Postbox Project

Many of our residents will have experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness since the Covid pandemic began. To combat this we've partnered with The Forge Church and Suffolk County Council to launch [The Postbox Project](#). Our aim is to connect people across Suffolk, using letter writing to build new friendships. We are currently recruiting volunteers to write letters, so if you can spare a little time, [please let us know](#). Alternatively if you're aware of someone who is experiencing loneliness and would benefit from a letter, you can [refer them directly to the project](#).

### Postponement of the Women's Tour

The Women's Tour, the international cycle race originally scheduled to finish in Suffolk on 12 June 2021, [has been postponed](#) due to COVID-19. Organisers, Sweetspot Group, have requested alternate race dates of Monday 4 to Saturday 9 October from the sport's governing body. Once new dates are confirmed, we will begin our community activity and work with local schools and businesses to promote the tour coming to our district.