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COMMITTEE:	JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	THURSDAY, 14 MARCH 2024 9.30 AM
VENUE:	FRINK ROOM (ELISABETH) - ENDEAVOUR HOUSE

Members	
<u>Conservative</u> James Caston Brian Riley	<u>Green Party</u> Terence Carter Leigh Jamieson Janet Pearson
<u>Independent</u> Kathryn Grandon Mary McLaren	Ross Piper Miles Row Laura Smith
<u>Liberal Democrat</u> Keith Scarff John Whyman	

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AGENDA

PART 1

MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITH THE PRESS AND PUBLIC PRESENT

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7 **QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC**

To consider questions from and provide answers to members of the public on any matter in relation to which the Committee has powers or duties and of which due notice has been given in accordance with the Committee and Sub-Committee Procedures Rules.

8 **QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS**

To consider questions from and provide answers to Councillors on any matter in relation to which the Committee has powers or duties and of which due notice has been given in accordance with the Committee and Sub-Committee Procedure Rules.

9 **JOS/23/32 REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CULTURE, HERITAGE, AND VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY** 23 - 90

10 **JOS/23/33 INFORMATION BULLETIN - A REVIEW INTO THE USE OF CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICES** 91 - 98

The Information Bulletin is a document that is made available to the public with the published agenda papers. It can include update information requested by the Committee as well as information that a service considers should be made known to the Committee.

This Information Bulletin contains updates on the following subjects:

An overview of the different ways residents engage with customer services and how effectively these services are operating.

11 **JOS/23/34 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST**

To review the Council's Forthcoming Decisions List and identify any items to be brought before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Please note the most up to date version can be found via the Website:

[Forthcoming Decisions List » Babergh Mid Suffolk](#)

12 **JOS/23/35 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER** 99 - 104

13 **JOS/23/36 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN** 105 - 106

To agree the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan

14 **JOS/23/37 MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN** 107 - 108

To agree the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan

Date and Time of next meeting

Please note that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 22 April 2024 at 9.30 am.

For more information about this meeting, including access arrangements and facilities for people with disabilities, please contact the Committee Officer, Alicia Norman - Committees Services on: 01473 296384 or Email: Committees@babberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk

Introduction to Public Meetings

Babergh/Mid Suffolk District Councils are committed to Open Government. The proceedings of this meeting are open to the public, apart from any confidential or exempt items which may have to be considered in the absence of the press and public.

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2. Follow the signs directing you to the Fire Exits at each end of the floor.
3. Do not enter the Atrium (Ground Floor area and walkways). If you are in the Atrium at the time of the Alarm, follow the signs to the nearest Fire Exit.
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Agenda Item 3

BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS

Minutes of the meeting of the **JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 20 November 2023

PRESENT:

Chair: Mary McLaren (Chair)

Councillors:	Terence Carter	James Caston
	Kathryn Grandon	Leigh Jamieson
	Dr Ross Piper	Janet Pearson
	Keith Scarff	Brian Riley
	John Whyman	Laura Smith

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Jessie Carter – BDC Cabinet Member for Housing
John Ward
Elisabeth Malvisi
John Matthissen

Officers: Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions (AAY)
Assistant Manager – Housing Solutions (VB)
Housing Strategy and Policy Officer (RW)
Team Manager – Housing Solutions (RF)
Housing Solutions Officer (SA)
Housing Solutions Accommodation Officer (MHP)
Team Manager – Central Suffolk Lettings (SL)
Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny (AN)

46 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

46.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Miles Row.

47 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

47.1 Councillor Caston and Councillor Whyman declared an interest in item JOS/23/27 due to being private landlords.

47.2 Councillor Riley declared an interest in item JOS/23/27 due to being a director of a company which operates as a private landlord.

47.3 Councillor Scarff declared an interest in item JOS/23/27 due to being a trustee of the Stowmarket Relief Trust and his wife being a private landlord.

47.4 The Monitoring Officer granted all Councillors a dispensation to deal with housing matters. Therefore, all Members who declared an interest could remain on the Committee and participate in the debate and vote.

48 JOS/23/26 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 OCTOBER 2023

48.1 Councillor Jamieson proposed that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd October 2023 as detailed in the tabled papers be confirmed and signed as a true record.

48.2 Councillor Smith seconded the proposal.

By a vote of 9 For and 1 Abstention

It was RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd October 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

49 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME

49.1 None received.

50 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

50.1 None received.

51 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

51.1 None received.

52 JOS/23/27 HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2024

52.1 Councillor Jessie Carter – Babergh Cabinet Member for Housing – introduced the report to the Committee outlining before Members the Councils' commitment to reducing instances of rough sleeping, the mandates issued as part of the Homelessness Act (2002), the review of the previous 2019 – 2014 homelessness strategy, the factors which can result in people becoming homeless, the visions of the strategy, the development of a multi-agency approach, and thanked officers involved in the development and delivery of the strategy.

52.2 The Housing Strategy and Policy Officer provided a presentation to the Committee outlining before Members details of the previous strategy, the upcoming consultation period, the strategy's core vision, the delivery plan underpinning the strategy, and provided details on the work achieved and upcoming targets for each of the strategy's five priorities.

52.3 Councillor Scarff raised the requirement for senior leadership to agree and support the Councils becoming Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accredited and queried if the same agreement was required from the

authorities involved in the delivery of the strategy. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that becoming DAHA accredited had been presented to senior leadership and that commitment from various authorities would be sought at the Good Start Project Board.

- 52.4 Councillor Grandon queried what type of accommodation were rough sleepers often referred to. The Assistant Manager for Housing Solutions responded that the Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund provided the Councils with step-beds, either in houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) or self-contained units, where individuals were kept until their needs could be assessed and the appropriate long-term accommodation identified.
- 52.5 Councillor Grandon further questioned regarding the geography of rough sleepers across both Districts. The Assistant Manager for Housing Solutions responded that incidental rough sleepers were often found in urban areas and towns and that more entrenched rough sleepers were located in isolated rural areas.
- 52.6 Councillor Scarff questioned what plans had been put in place to continue funding the delivery of the strategy beyond the end of the Rough Sleeping Initiative funding in 2025. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that a review of staffing and the delivery of the strategy would be undertaken to ensure that the Councils can afford to continue enacting the service at its current level sustainably.
- 52.7 Councillor Terence Carter questioned whether the strategy permitted rough sleepers to keep their pets when being rehoused into temporary accommodation. The Housing Solutions Accommodation Officer responded that a pet policy was currently being devised and that pets were permitted in a majority of temporary accommodation units where it can be supervised.
- 52.8 Councillor Caston queried how much impact the cost of living crisis, coupled with a lack of available rental properties at affordable prices and the rural geography of the districts, was having on meeting targets and being able to deliver an effective strategy. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that it was likely impossible to end rough sleeping as a whole due to the number of factors leading people to become homeless, but that delivery of the strategy was still effective in ending entrenched rough sleeping.
- 52.9 Councillor Malvisi queried what proportion of rough sleepers were fleeing domestic and sexual violence. The Assistant Manager for Housing Solutions responded that 15.47% of rough sleepers in Babergh and 18.22% in Mid Suffolk listed domestic abuse as their primary reason for becoming homeless.
- 52.10 Councillor Matthissen questioned if there had been a local increase in no fault evictions due to the national increase in mortgage rates and whether the Council had explored buying properties to prevent tenants from being evicted in the case of property sale. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that the Councils did get approached by private landlords to purchase properties and that these were assessed on a case by case basis.

The Team Manager for Central Suffolk Lettings further responded that the Councils were able to offer landlords a five year plan to provide them with more security to mitigate the rise in mortgage rates and that this increase was resulting in more properties being put up for sale.

- 52.11 Councillor Carter questioned if improvements had been made to temporary accommodation units to make them more accessible to those with disabilities or mobility difficulties. The Team Manager for Central Suffolk Lettings responded that improvements had been made across the board and that bespoke units that are fully accessible are now part of the stock and are offered to rough sleepers with disabilities.
- 52.12 Councillor Grandon questioned the reasons for implementing a charge for private landlords to let their properties through Central Suffolk Lettings as part of the homelessness strategy. The Team Manager for Central Suffolk Lettings responded that all landlords who wished to manage their properties through an agency would have to pay fees and that the cost of using Central Suffolk Lettings would be small and not for profit.
- 52.13 Councillor Jamieson queried if there was mixing of different kinds of tenants in temporary accommodation units of multiple occupation. The Team Manager for Central Suffolk Lettings responded that often families were housed in self-contained units with no mixing and that service users were assessed for their needs before placing them in the most appropriate accommodation.
- 52.14 Councillor Smith questioned if residents who were being moved out of temporary accommodation into long term accommodation were being placed in Band A council tax properties. The Assistant Manager for Housing Solutions responded that the council tax banding was determined by the information provided in a homelessness application, that Band B was determined as the appropriate type of housing to refer residents into, and that Band A properties were used in exceptional circumstances.
- 52.15 Councillor Whyman questioned if there were plans to extend the profile of Central Suffolk Lettings and further communicate their service to private landlords. The Team Manager for Central Suffolk Lettings responded that there was a degree of budget limitation in terms of publicity and marketing but that there were plans to raise Central Suffolk Lettings' corporate profile internally.
- 52.16 Councillor Jamieson questioned if single men were at a disadvantage when it came to homelessness and rehousing in permanent accommodation. The Corporate Manager for Housing Solutions responded that single men were the demographic most likely to be homeless but that the strategy's processes treat everyone equally regardless of circumstances.

A short break was held between 12:52pm and 13:06pm.

52.17 Members debated the item on issues including:

- The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation;
- Funding beyond the Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund ending in 2025;
- The breadth of services provided under the strategy's delivery plan;
- The changes between the 2019 – 2023 strategy and the 2024 – 2019 strategy;
- Further communication of the services provided by the strategy and Central Suffolk Lettings;
- Support for under 25s to become adequately housed in the Districts;

52.18 The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny put forward the following recommendations based on the questions and debate from Members:

- That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commends the housing department for the work they are conducting to help reduce homelessness in the Districts and requests that officers take on board the comments made at the meeting.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the vision and priorities of the draft Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy and ensures that the Delivery Plan is reflective of the current challenges facing the Districts.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee strongly supports the work being undertaken to meet the domestic abuse housing alliance accreditation.
- That Cabinet makes further plans to provide financial support for the services provided under the homelessness reduction and rough sleeping strategy beyond the end of the Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding in 2025.
- That Cabinet explores further means of providing assistance to those under 25 with becoming adequately housed in order to avoid an influx of young people becoming homeless.
- That Cabinet explores providing more resources to the housing department to assist with communicating about the services available from the Councils and Central Suffolk Lettings to those who are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless.

52.19 Councillor Jamieson proposed the recommendations as read out by the Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny.

52.20 Councillor Scarff seconded the proposal.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commends the housing department for the work they are conducting to help reduce homelessness in the Districts and requests that officers take on board the comments made at the meeting.
- 1.2. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the vision and priorities of the draft Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy and ensures that the Delivery Plan is reflective of the current challenges facing the Districts.
- 1.3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee strongly supports the work being undertaken to meet the domestic abuse housing alliance accreditation.
- 1.4. That Cabinet makes further plans to provide financial support for the services provided under the homelessness reduction and rough sleeping strategy beyond the end of the Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding in 2025.
- 1.5. That Cabinet explores further means of providing assistance to those under 25 with becoming adequately housed in order to avoid an influx of young people becoming homeless.
- 1.6. That Cabinet explores providing more resources to the housing department to assist with communicating about the services available from the Councils and Central Suffolk Lettings to those who are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless.

53 JOS/23/28 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER

- 53.1 Councillor Jamieson queried the reasons why some recommendations for Item JOS/23/15 were listed as “not started”. The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny responded that recommendation 1.2. and 1.6. had been completed, that this would be rectified on the action tracker, and that discussions were being had with the appropriate officers regarding getting the other outstanding actions progressed.
- 53.2 Councillor Riley requested if the date for the annual review of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership in 2024 could be added to the action tracker to suitably advise members of when these actions would be reported back to the Committee. The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny responded that this would be included in the tracker as requested.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 13:33pm.

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Chair

Agenda Item 4

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 22 January 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor: Mary McLaren (Chair)
John Whyman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Kathryn Grandon Leigh Jamieson
Laura Smith

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Dave Busby – Leader of the Council
John Ward – Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, & Investments
Derek Davis
Paul Clover

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)
Director for Operations (ME)
Director for Planning and Building Control (TB)
Director for Housing (DF)
Corporate Manager – Finance, Commissioning, & Procurement (KW)
Senior Finance Business Partner (SC)
Finance Business Partner (JS)

9 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

9.1 None received.

10 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

10.1 None declared.

11 BOS/23/04 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2023

11.1 Councillor Whyman proposed that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

11.2 Councillor Smith seconded the proposal.

By a unanimous vote

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

12 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME

12.1 None received.

13 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

13.1 None received.

14 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

14.1 None received.

15 BOS/23/05 GENERAL FUND (GF) AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2024/25

15.1 Councillor John Ward, Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments, introduced the report to the committee outlining before Members: the budget gap for the General Fund and the deficit for the HRA, the overall position for 2024/25, the cost pressures and savings, the increase in net cost of service, the council tax increase, the top slice of funding to the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group (SPSLG), planning fee increases, the earmarked reserves to assist with budget funding, the forecasted position for the next three years, the revenue contribution to capital, loan repayments and interest rates, the increase in council housing rents and garage rents, and introduced the finance team for further questions.

15.2 Councillor Whyman asked for clarification on how business rates worked for Councils in terms of what money we collect and how much is received by Government. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments responded that at a baseline 50% of business rates were taken by the Government, 40% went to District Councils and the remaining 10% went to County Councils but that due to government assessments the Council usually receives less than 40%.

15.3 Councillor Grandon queried if the interest receivable from CIFCO was income for the Council. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments responded that this was money CIFCO paid to the Council from the rental income from their properties.

15.4 Councillor Jamieson questioned the reasons for the reduction in the interest receivable from CIFCO. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments responded that some money was being retained by CIFCO for capital improvements and that deferred rental payments had been agreed.

15.5 Councillor Whyman questioned what strategic plans were in place to assist with reaching a balanced budget in the future. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments responded that the Senior Leadership Team would be reviewing how services would be delivered and the costs associated with this. The Chief Executive responded that a balance would be

struck between increasing income and decreasing costs of service delivery.

- 15.6 Councillor Jamieson queried whether the revenue budget pressure arising from the forecast loss at the former HQ site in Hadleigh would have an impact on this years budgets as well as next years. The Corporate Manager for Finance, Assets, and Investments responded that it would have an impact on both but that it could not be forecasted in the current papers due to the project's ongoing status and the fluctuation of market prices.
- 15.7 Councillor McLaren queried the reasons for the decrease in neighbourhood planning income. The Director for Planning and Building Control responded that this income was from designated areas where grants had come into the Council to help support the parish with referendum and advertising costs and that there was simply an anticipated reduction in this amount from what had previously been forecasted.
- 15.8 Councillor Grandon queried what HR and organisational development costs entailed. The Chief Executive responded that this was money spent internally on training and corporately developing staff.
- 15.9 Councillor Whyman questioned if residents would get support from the Council towards their increased social and affordable housing rents. The Director for Housing responded that there were financial inclusion officers within housing solutions who worked with residents to offer multiple types of support and that this increase in rent would be covered by housing benefits for those tenants on universal credit.
- 15.10 Councillor Whyman further questioned if the costs for the building services transformation was a one-off cost or a reoccurring charge. The Director for Housing responded that it was a one-off cost due to the hiring of interim staff to assist with the transformation.
- 15.11 Councillor McLaren queried if the costs for services and supplies as detailed in Table 2 covered the expenditure for hiring external consultants to provide the Council with advice. The Senior Finance Business Partner responded that this was covered by the services and supplies cost and that a savings program aimed at reducing external contract spend was being introduced into next year's budget.
- 15.12 Members debated the item on issues including:
- Duplications of costs and expenses;
 - Delivery of key services;
 - Distribution of service delivery between the District and the Parish/Town councils;
 - Potential impact on staffing levels;
 - The need for public engagement and further clarification on the pressures faced by the Council

15.13 The Governance Officer put forward the following recommendations based on the questions and debate from Members:

- That the draft revenue budgets set out in the report for the 2024/25 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets be noted.
- That engagement with the public, specifically through media releases and Town and Parish Liaison meetings, be encouraged to help outline and provide clarity to the public regarding the budget pressures on the Council.
- That the district authority actively considers the deployment of certain services to Town & Parish councils who have an appetite to accept functions currently carried out by Babergh District Council.

15.14 Councillor Jamieson proposed the recommendations as read out by the Governance Officer.

15.15 Councillor Whyman seconded the proposal.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1. That the draft revenue budgets set out in the report for the 2024/25 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets be noted.**
- 1.2. That engagement with the public, specifically through media releases and Town and Parish Liaison meetings, be encouraged to help outline and provide clarity to the public regarding the budget pressures on the Council.**
- 1.3. That the district authority actively considers the deployment of certain services to Town & Parish councils who have an appetite to accept functions currently carried out by Babergh District Council.**

16 BOS/23/06 UPDATE ON CAR PARKING CHARGES

16.1 Councillor Busby, the Leader of Babergh District Council, introduced the information bulletin to the committee outlining before Members: the reasons for presenting the bulletin to the committee, current budget pressures, the current way car parking charges are subsidised, the results of the strategic review completed in 2023, the potential impact on the environment and climate change, the aim to cut down on unnecessary car journeys, and the future impact of potential savings.

16.2 Councillor Jamieson queried how public transport provision would be funded if the direction from the executive was to encourage the public to travel into towns sustainably rather than using cars. Councillor Ward, Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments responded that assessments would have to be made regarding appropriate tariffs to put in each car park and that further plans would be drawn up once these figures had been realised.

- 16.3 Councillor Whyman questioned whether Hadleigh or Sudbury had carried out economic impact assessments to determine how businesses on the high street would be affected should parking charges be implemented. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments responded that he did not believe any economic impact assessments had been formally carried out by the town councils.
- 16.4 Councillor Smith queried if there would be any ring fenced money from the potential incoming charges to fund sustainable forms of transport. The Leader of the Council responded that the Council was going out to consultation with the town councils, as agreed by Cabinet, to get their direction on how they would like to see their towns developed in terms of access and transport and that the ring fencing of money would be considered at a medium-term financial review.
- 16.5 Councillor McLaren asked for clarification on how engagement with the town councils would take place and what this would entail. The Director for Operations responded that this consultation would be led by the Strategic Policy team and would mainly take form of a questionnaire, that engagement questions would be sent out to all district councillors and recognised groups, and that he had attended town council meetings and met with Clerks of said councils to gather views.
- 16.6 Councillor Grandon queried the validity of following on from the decision made by the Cabinet in 2021 to implement car parking charges. The Chief Executive clarified that this work was not following on from the decision made by Cabinet in 2021, that the entire process had started from scratch, and that the decision to implement car parking charges had not yet been made – this would be decided by Cabinet in March this year.
- 16.7 Councillor Jamieson queried if parking charges would be implemented at leisure centre car parks and if the impact on attendance and economic intake of these leisure centres had been assessed and considered. The Director for Operations responded that in instances where the Council leases car parks for businesses, such as leisure centres, shops, or village halls, that arrangements had been made with the Council's parking team to assess what could be done to limit the impact of introducing charges.
- 16.8 Councillor Smith questioned if consultation had also taken place with nearby Councils who do subsidise their town parking and if the Council had queried their reasons for not implementing paid parking. The Director for Operations responded that discussions had been held with these Councils and that in most cases only the first hour of parking was free or the town councils contributed funds to the district councils to help subsidise these costs.
- 16.9 Councillor Smith further questioned if resident permits had been considered as part of these propositions. The Director for Operations responded that implementing resident permit zones was an option available and that this would require collaboration with the county council to put in place.

16.10 Councillor Grandon questioned if the potential impact on volunteers working within the towns would be taken into consideration when drafting parking charges. The Director for Operations responded that funding for the voluntary sector was currently under significant pressure and that considerations would be made to support volunteers.

16.11 Members debated the item on issues including:

- The existing parking charges subsidies;
- The potential benefits for the environment;
- Patterns of behaviour from residents in terms of where they shop;
- The consequences of the budget deficit;
- The original Cabinet decision from 2021 to implement car parking charges;
- Consultation and engagement with the town councils;
- The potential impact on local businesses

16.12 This information bulletin was noted.

17 BOS/23/07 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

17.1 No comments.

18 BOS/23/08 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER

18.1 No comments.

19 BOS/23/09 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

19.1 Councillor Jamieson raised concerns about the upcoming planning enforcement item and that it did not encompass all issues discussed by the committee at their original scoping meeting. The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny responded that this item had yet to go to Chairs Briefing so had not been further scoped and that there would be opportunity to refine the topic further to ensure that all points were being picked up as appropriate.

19.2 Councillor Grandon raised that a topic regarding working from home and the potential impact on the delivery of services, particularly customer focussed, could be added to the work plans. The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny responded that an upcoming item already on the work plans would focus on the current delivery of customer services and that concerns about officers utilising agile working to work from home should be raised with the Chief Executive.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 17:03pm.

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Chair

Agenda Item 5

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 22 January 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor: James Caston (Chair)
Keith Scarff (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Terence Carter Janet Pearson
Dr Ross Piper Miles Row

In attendance:

Councillors(s): Rachel Eburne – Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
John Whitehead

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)
Director – Planning and Building Control (TB)
Director – Operations (ME)
Director – Housing (DF)
Corporate Manager – Finance, Commissioning, & Procurement
Senior Finance Business Partner (SC)
Finance Business Partner (JS)

9 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

9.1 None received.

10 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

10.1 None declared.

11 MOS/23/04 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2023

11.1 Councillor Scarff proposed that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

11.2 Councillor Pearson seconded the proposal.

By a unanimous vote

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

12 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME

12.1 None received.

13 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

13.1 None received.

14 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

14.1 None received.

15 MOS/23/05 GENERAL FUND (GF) AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2024/25

15.1 Councillor Eburne, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, introduced the report to the committee outlining before Members: the increase in employee costs, the decrease in fees and charges, funding through reserves, the impact of interest rates on borrowing and investments, the proposed changes to empty homes rates, the Gateway 14 dividend, the increase in rents, the backlog of repairs, and introduced the Finance team for further questions.

15.2 Councillor Caston queried the main reason for the decrease in income generated from sales, fees, and charges. The Senior Financial Business Partner responded that this was largely due to a drop in planning income of approximately £700,000.

15.3 Councillor Caston asked for clarification on the minimum revenue position. The Corporate Manager for Finance, Commissioning, and Procurement responded that it was a statutory charge to the revenue budget that only occurs when borrowing takes place.

15.4 Councillor Scarff queried if the assumption of 17 properties purchased through the right to buy scheme in 2024/25 was a cautious estimate. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that 17 properties was a median estimate and that the amount of homes purchased through the right to buy scheme had ranged from 10 to 25 over the last 15 years.

15.5 Councillor Scarff also questioned what factors contributed to the 7.7% increase in rental income. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that rent was now charged on move-in day, that voids had been shortened, and that repairs and maintenance to properties were now more pro-active to make sure properties were suitable to move in to.

15.6 Councillor Pearson queried the figure for depreciation within the HRA and whether this was a P&I budget. The Financial Business Partner responded that depreciation figures were included in HRA budgets as standard business practice and that the figure was based on stock valuation.

- 15.7 Councillor Caston queried the reasons for no rise in business rates from renewable energy developments. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that the business rates are on a year's delay and the rise in rates from an increase in renewable energy developments would be shown in the 2025/26 budgets.
- 15.8 Councillor Pearson questioned the reasons why the figures for transfer to / from reserves as detailed in Table 2 were different to the general fund earmarked reserves figures as detailed in Table 5. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that the figures matched once dividends not being used in the General Fund, such as Gateway 14 and the Skills and Innovation Centre, were removed from the calculations and that some of the reserves were being used to fund the capital budget rather than the revenue budget.
- 15.9 Councillor Scarff questioned what steps were being taken by the Council to lobby the Government on improving the one year settlement regime. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that the Leader of the Council had recently lobbied government on this issue and would continue to do so.
- 15.10 Councillor Whitehead queried the reasons for the increase in interest payable within both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that the Councils undertook a significant amount of short-term borrowing and that the interest rates on these loans had increased to above 5%.
- 15.11 Councillor Row asked for more information on the budgets' auditing process and how this was conducted. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that these audits are run by external companies but that Mid Suffolk's had not been conducted and was overdue. The Corporate Manager for Finance, Commissioning, and Procurement further responded that this was the case for many local authorities and that the Government was in the process of implementing new plans to eliminate the backlog of outstanding local authority audits by September 2024.
- 15.12 Councillor Whitehead questioned why money was being taken out of the COVID-19 General Fund reserve at such a slow rate. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that money could only be taken from the reserve under extremely specific COVID related scenarios and that the Council had to issue proof of how this money was being used.
- 15.13 Councillor Scarff queried if unspent money from the COVID-19 reserve was liable to go back to Government or if the money belonged to the Council. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that this money belonged to the Council.

15.14 Members debated the item on issues including:

- Short-term borrowing;
- Interest payable on both short and long-term borrowing;
- Accessibility of the information in the report;
- Links between the report and the Treasury Management report due to be reviewed by the Joint Audit and Standards Committee;
- A breakdown of calculations;
- Concerns over a lack of external audit;
- Lobbying central government over the one-year settlement;
- Introducing graphs and glossaries to future reports to allow finances to be easily dissected and reviewed.

A short break was taken between 10:30am and 10:48am for the Committee and Officers to formulate recommendations.

15.15 The Governance Officer put forward the following recommendations based on questions and debate from Members:

- That the draft revenue budgets set out in the report for the 2024/25 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets be noted and that the new approach to budget setting is welcomed by the Overview and Scrutiny committee.
- That further information on interest receivable and capital expenditure be included in future Overview and Scrutiny reports to provide a breakdown of interest for all projects and debt.
- That tables detailing the breakdown of information on aspects such as the increase in dwelling rents and service charging be included in future Overview and Scrutiny reports.
- That the lobbying of central government on the 1 year funding settlement being increased be continued.
- That information on relevant projects be placed together and presented in a collective summary in future reports for accessibility purposes.
- That officers explore incorporating accessibility improvements into the reports, including bridge charting, graphics, and a glossary, to provide Members with further clarity on the information provided.

15.16 Councillor Scarff proposed the recommendations as read out by the Governance Officer.

15.17 Councillor Piper seconded the proposal.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1. That the draft revenue budgets set out in the report for the 2024/25 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets be noted and that the new approach to budget setting is welcomed by the Overview and Scrutiny committee.
- 1.2. That further information on interest receivable and capital expenditure be included in future Overview and Scrutiny reports to provide a breakdown of interest for all projects and debt.
- 1.3. That tables detailing the breakdown of information on aspects such as the increase in dwelling rents and service charging be included in future Overview and Scrutiny reports.
- 1.4. That the lobbying of central government on the 1 year funding settlement being increased be continued.
- 1.5. That information on relevant projects be placed together and presented in a collective summary in future reports for accessibility purposes.
- 1.6. That officers explore incorporating accessibility improvements into the reports, including bridge charting, graphics, and a glossary, to provide Members with further clarity on the information provided.

16 MOS/23/06 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

16.1 No comments.

17 MOS/23/07 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER

17.1 Councillor Scarff queried if information on what materials could be recycled could be incorporated into recommendation 1.4 for Report JOS/23/15 Review on the Current Levels of Untreated Sewage Discharges to Waters in Babergh and Mid Suffolk as this recommendation was yet to be explored and implemented. Councillor Caston responded that this would be raised with the Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny outside of the meeting.

18 MOS/23/08 MSDC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

18.1 Councillor Row suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny committee could look into the accessibility of materials being communicated to the public. Councillor Caston responded that this would be raised as a possible topic to add to the work plans at the next Overview and Scrutiny Chairs Briefing.

18.2 Councillor Carter added that a review of internal communications, documents, and reports could also be undertaken. Councillor Caston responded that this could be explored as part of a Task and Finish Group and that it would be raised at the next briefing.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 11:02am.

.....
Chair

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Agenda Item 9

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL and MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: Joint Overview And Scrutiny Committee	REPORT NUMBER: JOS/23/32
FROM: Cllr. Tim Weller – Cabinet Member for Environment, Culture & Wellbeing – Mid Suffolk District Council & Cllr Teresa Davis - Cabinet Member for Thriving Towns and Rural Communities – Mid Suffolk District Council Cllr Derek Davis – Cabinet Member for Economic Growth – Babergh District Council.	DATE OF MEETING: 14/03/2024
OFFICER: Fiona Duhamel, Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change	KEY DECISION REF NO. Item No.

12-month progress update on the 2023 – 2028 Culture, Heritage, and Visitor Economy Strategy

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide a 12-month review on the work undertaken so far following the adoption of the Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy in March 2023.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the contents of this report be noted.
- 2.2 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the contents of this report, provide scrutiny and, where appropriate, provide written and/or verbal responses.

REASON FOR DECISION

To provide further insight into the work undertaken since March 2023 to deliver the councils first Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy strategy, with the ambition to shape the future growth of the districts and provide a prospectus for investment.

3. KEY INFORMATION

- 3.1 In March 2023, Creative Tourist were contracted to deliver a Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy and Action Plan for Babergh and Mid Suffolk, providing a 5-year evidence base as a springboard for our ambitions.
- 3.2 A cross party Member working group was formed and met throughout the Strategy and Action Plan development. The group was used to test early outcomes from stakeholder consultations and the insights reports, acting as critical friends and advocates for the overall vision. The group helped frame the Action Plan and broke it down into more manageable and achievable outputs with smarter objectives.

- 3.3 The Strategy and Action Plan identified three themes:
- THEME 1: BUILDING CULTURAL HABITS – IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE FOR EVERYDAY RESIDENTS AND VISITORS
 - THEME 2.1: ACCELERATING PROGRESS – DEVELOPING THE SECTOR AND ITS RESILIENCE
 - THEME 2.2: ACCELERATING PROGRESS – DATA, INSIGHT AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
 - THEME 3: DRIVING COLLABORATION TO EVOVE CULTURAL HERITAGE PLACES AND DESTINATION
- 3.2 The adopted Strategy connected the worlds of culture, heritage and tourism – identifying and connecting over 300 places to visit and things to do. The strategy demonstrated how close we are to the huge visitor markets of London and the South-East, and that new developments – like Gainsborough’s House in Sudbury – have successfully launched with more in the pipeline, alongside energetic town partnerships. Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils continue to build strong relationships locally and regionally. However, it’s too easy for tourists to bypass the area on the way to the coast or Broads.
- 3.3 The strategy outlined that lovely landscapes also bring rural isolation, and the strengths of our culture and heritage are not yet joined-up on or offline for our communities or visitors. There are wonderful fine dining offers, great gastropubs, and quality farm shops carrying local produce and food products – if you can find them. We have the UK’s only Food Museum, but we don’t deliver a full ‘field to fork’ offer. We want to make this a stronger part of what we have to offer.
- 3.4 The Strategy and Action Plan prioritises work with businesses, local communities, artists, and environmentalists to grow a sustainable, welcoming, and creative cultural, heritage and visitor offer. Our action plan aims to create benefits in participation and training; growing new visitor markets; and supporting creative entrepreneurs and new talent.
- 3.5 Babergh & Mid Suffolk is diverse – from market town to market town, village to village. The richness of its culture and heritage is a powerful tool in building communities. To build on this, the Action Plan develops consistency of creative opportunity in every community, embedding culture into daily life alongside leisure, sport, wellbeing, social life, and lifelong education. We want to support people to live full cultural lives. We want our tourism to benefit, not damage our part of the world, and most of all we want to do it in partnership.
- 3.6 We are now 12 months into the delivery of this strategy and want to share with you, in Appendix A, a full breakdown of actions to date.
- 3.7 The full Action Plan details 52 individual actions against the main themes. There are 19 specific actions under THEME 1, 16 under THEME 2.1, 7 under THEME 2.2, and 10 under THEME 3.
- 3.14 To date 22 projects or programmes are being delivered through reprioritisation of existing budgets and resources, 17 are being delivered through external funding already received, and we are working on identification of funding for the remaining 13 actions.
- 3.15 This action plan is being delivered throughout the districts and not just where there is more critical mass of culture, heritage and creative businesses. Ensuring that rural organisations and communities are part of the conversation is vital. Additionally, working across boundaries within the county and across county borders is essential in order to help Babergh and Mid Suffolk realise their full potential.

4. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLANS

4.1 Links to Mid Suffolk Plan.

- 4.1.1 The first priority identified within the Mid Suffolk Plan is that Members want to see Mid Suffolk thriving. Not just economically but also culturally, socially and environmentally. With our focus on sustainability and community we want this district to be a great place to live, a great place to work, a great place to do business and a great place to visit.
- 4.1.2 Improved physical and mental well-being: Working in partnership with the voluntary sector to support the health and wellbeing of our residents. Working in partnership with employers and existing employment schemes to support 'life-long skills', progression in and out of employment and work life balance.
- 4.1.3 Respecting, harness and promoting local culture - Protect heritage buildings and bring to life for citizens. Use local history as cultural capital to attract visitors and residents alike. Promote local culture as a tool to increase sense of belonging and pride in district and to enhance local economy. Encourage existing economy to advertise and embed its sustainability to all, a 'field to fork' heritage.
- 4.1.4 Supporting better rural transport improving travel connectivity – projects exploring sustainable travel to cultural and visitor attractions are being developed with audits and assessments being carried out to support the attraction to attract visitors who don't travel by private car.
- 4.1.5 Active citizenship - Champion our communities that are thriving, sharing and showcasing what is working well in our communities.
- 4.1.6 Pride in your place - Work with communities and voluntary groups to ensure residents are proud of where they live and have the means/support to facilitate improving this.
- 4.1.7 Local food production - Develop resilience to shocks in food chain supply through local food production, including developing a comprehensive strategy for local food production, supporting new small-scale growers and producers across the district. Encouraging the setting up of new farmers' markets, farm shops and community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives across the district.
- 4.1.8 Supporting local businesses – the heart of this strategy is to support our culture, heritage and visitor economy businesses to thrive through diversification of offer as well as investment in sustainability and skills development.
- 4.1.9 Supporting the delivery of a greener, skilled economy – working with key partners, we are supporting the creation of new, higher value jobs and careers for life within this key sector.

4.2 Links to the Plan for Babergh

- 4.2.1 We believe that a sustainable society must be built on the strong foundations of its communities, economy and environment.
- 4.2.2 Thriving economy: Prioritising and promoting the green economy, Championing solutions to retrofitting & renewable energy, Promoting higher paid, higher skilled, sustainable jobs for all, Increasing opportunities to learn new skills, particularly those in green technology sectors, Creating the conditions for start-ups & social enterprises to flourish, Supporting local businesses, Attracting inward investment and responsible tourism to our towns and villages, and Ensuring access to the infrastructure your communities need to thrive - the heart of this strategy is to support our culture, heritage and visitor economy businesses to thrive through diversification of offer as well as investment in sustainability and skills development.

- 4.2.3 Promoting greener and healthier forms of travel – projects exploring sustainable travel to cultural and visitor attractions are being developed with audits and assessments being carried out to support the attraction to attract visitors who don't travel by private car.
- 4.2.4 Championing market towns and villages – a substantial number of our key attractions are within our market towns and villages, so through supporting those attractions to flourish, we will help support wider regeneration projects in our towns and villages. Alongside this, there are a range of actions that will deliver direct benefit to our market towns through new events and festivals as well as better public realm and enlivenment projects.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications from this report. Any financial implications identified in activity delivered so far, and throughout the course of the 5-year Action Plan, are expected to sit within current Council budgets or be delivered using external funding via a range of sources including Shared Prosperity Fund, Rural England Development Fund, Lottery Funding, Trusts and Foundations.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal implications included in this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 There are no risks associated with this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 This report has been shared for consultation with Cabinet Leads for feedback and comment.
- 8.2 Consultations have taken place with Directors, Corporate Managers, and other Budget Managers as appropriate.
- 8.3 The Strategy and Action Plan have been developed in partnership with a range of internal and external colleagues and stakeholders and they are being actively consulted in the development stage of every new action.

9. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

- 9.1 There is no requirement to complete an EQIA at this time.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no direct environmental implications directly associated with this report

11. APPENDICES

Title	Location
a) Presentation of progress to date	Attached
b) Mid Suffolk and Babergh Cultural, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy 2023 – 2028	Attached

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

13. REPORT AUTHORS

Zoey Banthorpe – Arts and Culture Lead

Michelle Gordon – Head of Service, Economy & Business

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Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy Progress to date (April 2023 – February 2024)

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**Overview and Scrutiny Committee
– 14 March 2024**





Strategy adopted in March 2023

THEME 1: BUILDING CULTURAL HABITS – IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE FOR EVERYDAY RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

THEME 2.1: ACCELERATING PROGRESS – DEVELOPING THE SECTOR AND ITS RESILIENCE

THEME 2.2: ACCELERATING PROGRESS – DATA, INSIGHT AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

THEME 3: DRIVING COLLABORATION TO EVOLVE CULTURAL HERITAGE PLACES AND DESTINATIONS

Cross Party Member Working Group

A cross party member working group was set up and met throughout the development of the Strategy and Action Plan.

This group has been used to test early outcomes from the stakeholder consultation and the insights report and helped to shape the work of the consultants.

The group helped frame the action plan and broke it down into more manageable and achievable outputs with a clearer vision.

Members included:

Mid Suffolk

Cllr Tim Weller

Cllr Teresa Davis

Cllr Gilly Morgan

Cllr Keith Scraff

Babergh

Cllr Derek Davis

Cllr Laura Smith



ACTION PLAN

52 PROJECT AREAS WITH ACTIONS

- 19 under THEME 1
- 16 under THEME 2.1
- 7 under THEME 2.2
- 10 under THEME 3

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22 areas delivered through internal budgets and resources

17 areas delivered through external funding already received

13 areas with funding still be found



PROGRESS TO DATE

THEME 1: BUILDING CULTURAL HABITS – IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE FOR EVERYDAY RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

Reviewed the guidance for organising and planning events, linked with Suffolk Advisory Group and Licensing for joint working on future submissions. Creation of an event management plan template to simplify and guide future applications.

Levelling Up - Shared Prosperity Funding allocated towards Sudbury and Stowmarket Wayfinding schemes (£100K)

Development of specific Heart of Suffolk website, newsletters, blogs and social media including arts, culture and tourism information and signposting

Appointment of 2-year f/t Events and Festivals Coordinator Post, funded via levelling Up - Shared Prosperity Funding

Babergh & Mid Suffolk's Big Weekend being developed for Autumn 2024 including public ballot for free tickets across events and attractions

Work with partners such as Primadonna Festival and Orchestras Live to deliver social inclusion programmes to support access to culture for marginalised groups.



PROGRESS TO DATE

THEME 1: BUILDING CULTURAL HABITS – IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE FOR EVERYDAY RESIDENTS AND VISITORS CONTINUED

Activities and Events organised and funded via the Welcome Back Fund including Incredible Moving Cinema (Oct 23 - Sudbury 1400 attendees), SPARK Festival (Feb 24 - Sudbury 1200 attendees), Primadonna Festival (July 23 – Stowmarket 1800 attendees), Jubilant (July 23 - 275 students, aged between 7-16, 10 local schools, 10 freelance creatives, more than 100 hours of participatory workshops)

Launch of BMSDC Rural Culture and Creativity Fund using Rural England Prosperity Funding for capital investment (£65k for 2023/24 and £140k for 2024/5)

Great Big Green Week planning (8-16 June) including Eco Markets, Sustainable Travel Events, Climate Cafes, Low Carbon Living Architects Tours

Business as usual - review and comment on planning applications that support development of the tourism, heritage and visitor economy sectors.



PROGRESS TO DATE

THEME 2.1: ACCELERATING PROGRESS – DEVELOPING THE SECTOR AND ITS RESILIENCE

Pop up ARTSPACE gallery and studio model delivered in Stowmarket and two other spaces planned for Kersey Mill.

Good Journey scheme launched to promote car free visitor travel through discounted fees at attractions, car free itinerary development and associated marketing with partners

Continue to work with our county film locations Office, Screen Suffolk, to bring Film and TV filming into BMS and create training and employment offer into film sector

Wingfield Barns audience insight work delivered via The Audience Agency (still in progress)

Worked alongside ACCESS ABLE to carry out audits and produce online detailed access guides across 50+ BMS attractions and venues (funded via Suffolk Growth)

Launched AccessAble Disability Essentials E-Learning programme that businesses can access for free

Provided first time funding advice for Creative Businesses via SUFFOLK GROWTH HUB – funded via Shared Prosperity Funding



PROGRESS TO DATE

THEME 2.2: ACCELERATING PROGRESS – DATA, INSIGHT AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Commission Destination Research to provide annual reports to examine the volume and value of tourism and the impact of visitor expenditure on the local economy each year and provide comparative data

Appoint Visitor Insights to gather new tourism and town centre data to better inform decision making and project planning

Draft data sharing agreements for attractions to share live trends to enable better planning and integration

Worked on Festivals and events review and strategy development for Suffolk (funded via Suffolk Growth)

Involved in the commissioning of Suffolk Visitor Economy Review analysing the area's Visitor Economy marketing and partnership activity and to provide recommendations for future strategic actions.



PROGRESS TO DATE

THEME 3: DRIVING COLLABORATION TO EVOLVE CULTURAL HERITAGE PLACES AND DESTINATIONS

Development and promotion of walking trails and games on the Love Exploring app (funded via Shared Prosperity Funding)

Working with Ipswich and Colchester Museums Service on Constable 250 Heritage Lottery Fund

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Submitted bid to Bus Improvement Scheme at SCC for reintroduction and expansion of Dedham Vale Hopper Bus

Develop grants for 'Makers and Producers' markets and events to showcase products and skills of our local entrepreneurs, micro and small businesses (funded via Shared Prosperity Fund)

Shared Suffolk destination marketing campaigns led by Visit Suffolk, including Naturally, Masters of the Air and TV & Film tourism



Example KPI's for across 3 themes. Targets will be listed and recorded on the performance management system, Pentana.

25% increase no. of shooting days across BMS through Screen Suffolk

Up to at least 20 CHVE businesses accessing support through Growth Hub

80 members of staff across 25 CHVE organisations trained on Disability Essentials

20% increase in no of visitors accessing Heart of Suffolk content on the Visit Suffolk site

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No of groups benefitting with delivery of small-medium events
25

Access Able site audits across 50 CHVE venues

Wayfinding schemes delivered across Stowmarket and Sudbury

Appointment of fixed term 2-year Cultural Projects Officer

Target of 10 attractions by the end of Year 1 signed up to Data Sharing Agreement

Monthly content to targeted marketing accounts of 59,000

No. of venues registered in pilot Big Weekend Scheme – 20 and 25,000 sign ups

5 locations across BMS agreed for Visitor Insights footfall and demographic figs

The Bigger Picture

Suffolk County Council pulling £500k 'core funding' from April 2025 and replacing this with a new £500,000 project fund which all Suffolk arts and heritage organisations can apply for.

Nationally a 24% real terms reduction in 'core spending power' for providing services, including government grants, retained business rates and council tax, from 2010/11 to 2024/25.

Grants being reduced or shortened where councils can no longer confidently guarantee the money would be available over several years.

Significant exodus of freelancers from the creative sector during Covid and more being forced out.

BUT Local Government remains the largest public investor in culture and all is not lost – we need to make that money go further. The stacked funding model in culture – a mix of core funding, philanthropy, sponsorship, project funding and earned income.

Norfolk and Suffolk Councillor Briefing on the 15 March delivered by Norfolk and Suffolk Culture Board. Providing information on how the sector is funded, explaining the concept of 'stacked' funding and the range of business models including commercial, charitable and direct local authority delivery.

Present will be Arts Council England (including info on S106), National Lottery for Heritage, and Historic England – all talking about the support that can offer each council.



Visit East of England/Visit Suffolk

Annual £7k contribution from each LA towards marketing campaigns

Visit East of England is a private sector, not for profit limited company that is the region's visitor economy conduit to DCMS and national tourism organisations i.e. VisitBritain and VisitEngland.

It was created to provide a collective voice for the sector following a comment from VisitBritain: 'We only hear white noise coming out of the East'. Chaired by Adnams CEX, Andy Wood, VEE has established itself as the region's strategic voice for the visitor economy and played a crucial role in the sector's response to the Covid pandemic.

It receives no core funding, but marketing funds from local authorities in Suffolk and Norfolk have helped facilitate a coalition of destination organisations, led by VEE and including The Suffolk Coast, Bury St Edmunds and Beyond, All About Ipswich and Discover Newmarket, that promote the two counties to a domestic audience and, in future, to an overseas audience.

VEE also operates Visit Suffolk and Visit Norfolk and the VEE sector group includes representatives of DCMS, Stansted Airport and Greater Anglia Rail.

- [Visit East of England | Welcome to the East of England](#) [Visit Suffolk | Welcome to Suffolk](#)

Strengths: Established regional brand, good relationship with DCMS/Visit England/Visit Britain, promotes inbound tourism, developed the DMO coalition, operates Visit Suffolk.

Weaknesses: Business model is unstable, funding issues and concerns about how VEE is managed. Recently announced they are in serious financial difficulties and were bailed out by NCC. LA's have been asked to double their contributions which has not been received well. Visit Suffolk also needs further development and all LA's have concerns about its performance.

Opportunities: Could become a LVEP which would bring financial resources, but business model would need to change as it doesn't currently meet the LVEP criteria

National DMO review

An independent review to examine and assess the role, structure and performance of destination management organisations (DMOs) across England was published in March 2021

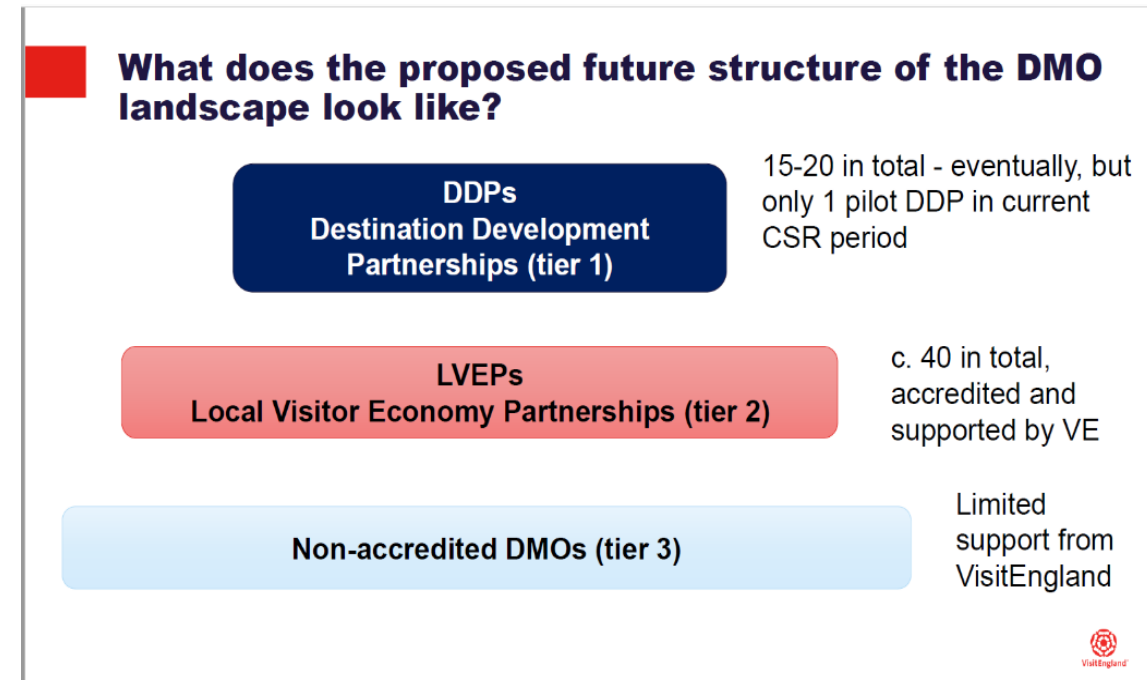
[Independent review of destination management organisations \(DMOs\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/91221/independent-review-of-destination-management-organisations-dmos.pdf)

Key points from the review:

- Accreditation process to create a national portfolio of DMOs and minimise fragmentation.
- The national portfolio split into two tiers –a top tier of ‘Destination Development Partnerships’ and a second tier of accredited DMOs.
- All other Destination Organisations part of 3rd tier, no direct relationship with government/VB/VE and served by one-to-many approach.
- Visit England responsible for new tiered structure.

DMOs should:

- Be more collaborative and share best practice
- Seek to diversify their income streams
- Develop the skills of their staff
- Have more diverse boards
- LEPs and local authorities to recognise the importance of visitor economy and DMOs
- LAs to recognise that DMOs need to be public-private partnerships



Suffolk Visitor Economy Review



The review included an analysis of Suffolk's strategic and market position.



It assessed the current landscape to identify the most effective, efficient, sustainable, and accessible model to promote and support the growth and development of Suffolk's Visitor Economy.



The review provided information on how the Visitor Economy in Suffolk needs to be strategically led, marketed and managed with involvement from key public and private sector partners and neighbouring destinations.



It included a comprehensive assessment, mapping, and audit of the current Suffolk visitor economy support structures.



It provided valuable insights into the existing state of the current provision, identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the future of Suffolk's visitor economy and make recommendations for a collaborative Suffolk model that takes into account the



The full report will be presented to SCOLT on 11 March 2024

Next steps..

Monthly updates with Cabinet leads on progress

Record achievements and impact over the next 12 months and update and inform Cabinets on progress.

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CULTURE, HERITAGE & VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY FOR BABERGH & MID SUFFOLK DISTRICTS 2023-28

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Note to reader:

The document sometimes uses the shorthand of ‘sectors’ refer to culture, heritage and the visitor economy. It can also use ‘culture/cultural’ as shorthand for cultural heritage or culture and heritage.

This strategy features a number of ‘insets’ – short case studies and spotlights on key local organisations, and exemplars from further afield. The document takes a similar approach with quotes – from both local stakeholders and relevant regional and national reports and plans.

Front cover images:

Lavenham Wool Town, The Food Museum Stowmarket

Back cover: Gainsborough’s House

Commissioned by



“Our living heritage is rightly valued for its cultural, educational, aesthetic and historical importance but we can now also clearly see that it is an economic driver for inbound tourism to the UK, as well as sustaining domestic tourism too.”

‘The Impact of Heritage Tourism for the UK Economy’,
Bernard Donaghue, Association of Leading Visitor Attractions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The gentle ‘heart’ of Suffolk, Babergh & Mid Suffolk could easily have its identity and distinctiveness lost in the wider Suffolk story, the strong economic appeal of Ipswich, and the visitor pull of Suffolk coast. However, it does have cultural and heritage attributes across its diverse communities that are both strong and distinctive. Inspired by landscape and shaped by industry (especially food & drink), the heart of Suffolk can celebrate its culture and heritage with a confidence that can build a sense of place. This in turn can drive civic pride, local opportunities and the visitor economy.

quality farm shops carrying local produce and food products – but only through some businesses and routes to market. This offer can increase its visibility and accessibility to market.

The cross-sector desire to co-design and co-develop is evident. By building creativity alongside robust insights-driven approach will help to develop the narrative for the area – into planning (not least for heritage conservation, access and interpretation) and regeneration, community programmes and destination management.

A clear Vision has emerged from the extensive engagement with stakeholders: Set in a landscape of enduring inspiration, we will work together to create distinctive, welcoming, and vital cultural places and experiences that energise our communities, our enterprises and our visitors to embrace the progressive heart of Suffolk.

To build on this, a short set of themes start to give shape to the Strategy. These are based on building consistency of cultural opportunity and behaviour in every local community, embedding culture into daily life alongside leisure, sport, wellbeing, social life and lifelong education. The Strategy also aims to be a catalyst to building resilience through partnership working, and the use of data, insight & digital transformation. Babergh & Mid Suffolk is full of heritage and culturally-rich places – this Strategy will work to make understood and valued by locals, visitors and other stakeholders.

This Strategy balances the interdependent worlds of culture, heritage and tourism. Some parts of the UK can claim 40% of their visitor economy is driven by culture and heritage. Babergh & Mid Suffolk have the assets and qualities to achieve similar. An initial mapping exercise revealed over 300 place-based assets. Whilst any cultural heritage sector is under threat in current economic conditions, there are reasons to be positive. The Councils continue to build strong relationships across the sector and regionally. The area is close to massive visitor markets in the South-East. New capital developments have successfully launched with more in the pipeline, and local culturally-led forums are getting established. However, it is easy for tourists to bypass the area on the way to the Suffolk coast / Norfolk Broads. Lovely landscapes also means rural isolation, and the strengths of culture and heritage are not yet joined-up through a data-led digital transformation. Furthermore, a potential USP of ‘food’ does not yet fully deliver from ‘field to fork’. There are some wonderful fine dining offers (Michelin star level), excellent gastro-pubs, and

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SUFFOLK FOOD HALL

Suffolk Food Hall and partners – including engaging with the Food Enterprise Zone – could build a ‘foodie’ cluster in Wherstead. The Food Hall is a business itself but also provides opportunities for other new businesses to develop, so long as they celebrate Suffolk’s sense of place, food heritage and creativity. The Red Poll herd provides quality beef served in the restaurant – a truly field to fork experience. Located in the Suffolk Coast & Heath AONB, there is onsite accommodation providing a total visitor offer.

The strategic priorities – our aims and objectives – are summarised as clear, concise aims:

1. Babergh & Mid Suffolk will support its residents to live full cultural lives, building cultural confidence and civic pride.
2. The culture, heritage and visitor economy sectors will be sustainable, resilient and will champion its distinctive qualities.
3. Babergh and Mid Suffolk’s culture, heritage and visitor sectors will work collaboratively with neighbouring organisations, districts and counties to trial new approaches.

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The Strategy sets out a framework for implementation. The outline action plan will be fully co-developed with the sector to ensure that a number of critical areas are hardwired into Strategy implementation. These include: increasing opportunities for participation and training; supporting green social prescribing initiatives and place-based cultural forums; modelling for ‘pilot & roll-out’ initiatives; exploring new visitor markets, e.g. Purple Pound, wellbeing; and exploring cross-sector / -boundary ways of working / commissioning models. All this will be framed within a focus on developing and embedding a place / destination brand personality.

Babergh & Mid Suffolk is diverse – across the two districts, from market town to market town, village to village. The richness of its culture and heritage is a powerful tool in building communities, driving a place-based approach to regeneration and harnessing the potential of responsible tourism.



SPOTLIGHT: CREWE’S CREATIVE REGENERATION

The Crewe Cultural Forum is made up of over 100 people and organisations, committed to making culture central to the town’s development over the next decade. A working group, including arts, Councils, heritage, education, commerce and young people identified priorities. The ‘forum’ is very open and welcomes attendance from across the whole community. A strategy identifies goals to support the regeneration of Crewe through culture and heritage, aiming to create an environment where creativity leads the economic growth of the area.



A. CONTEXT

A1. INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Quiet, pretty, beautiful, tranquil, charming – Babergh & Mid Suffolk’s most obvious associations are of a quintessentially English pastoral scene, with historic towns and villages and rolling countryside. A place where heritage lives and breathes, and which has inspired some of Britain’s most celebrated artists for centuries. It is Britain’s breadbasket, producing quality food and drink to feed the nation. It’s a key connector between coast and county towns, between Essex and Cambridgeshire.

It’s the Heart of Suffolk.

There is a strong sense of place which carries visitor appeal, despite a relative lack of recognition as a destination. Most visitors headed for the coast will pass through the Babergh and Mid Suffolk districts en route. How do we persuade visitors to stop off, to stay and spend more time and money in the area, and to grow its profile? New, internationally significant cultural heritage assets are adding to the quality and ambition of the local offer, as well as demonstrating significant inward investment into the area. This makes this strategy a timely one, well-placed to capitalise on these new opportunities to create growth and interest for the culture, heritage and visitor economy sectors.

For residents, building pride in place, improving social factors (e.g. health and wellbeing), and increasing community vibrancy, can all be enabled through engagement with culture and heritage. Culture, heritage and visitor attractions must feel

inclusive, affordable and part of the expectations of everyday life of local residents. This will enable the sector to grow the next generation of visitor, staff and volunteers, securing the sustainability of the sector and delivering to wider social agendas.

Babergh & Mid Suffolk are often indivisible from Suffolk as a whole. They are part of the warp and weft. Strong regional partnerships and collaborations already exist, but the understanding and appreciation of the districts’ position within the wider county and region can be increased. Working boundary, cross-sector, and will provide a catalyst to realise all the ambitions of this strategy.

The strategy provides a clear vision and set of priorities which will build the confidence of Babergh & Mid Suffolk as a cultural community and destination, securing and growing the sustainability and resilience of these sectors for the benefit of residents and the economy.

LOCAL POPULATION

With a combined population of just over 200,000, both Babergh and Mid Suffolk have ‘super-ageing’ populations. Both districts have seen an increase of over 30% in people over the age of 65, amongst the highest growth in the UK for this age group. At the other end of the scale, both districts have experienced a decrease in those aged under 15, at 6% and 7.5% respectively.



DANCEEAST

DanceEast delivers a number of community programmes, including in residential care homes. By encouraging residents to move and express their creativity, older people can retain their mobility for longer. Interventions such as this can help to prevent falls, delay the onset or development of dementia, and provides valuable social interaction for residents. They also run Mini Movers for toddlers and their grown-ups, and targeted projects for young people. The rural nature of the district means it can be challenging to recruit participants to programmes, so working in partnership with other organisations is essential.

Again, these are amongst the biggest drops in the UK.¹

Whilst this story is shared by many rural areas across the UK, Babergh and Mid Suffolk's population changes are extreme - and this is not the case within neighbouring districts, where populations are not ageing at the same rate, or actually getting younger². This narrative aligns with the sense of Babergh & Mid Suffolk being somewhere to relax and retire. And whilst those peaceful qualities are attractive, the current trend does not lend itself to innovation, vibrancy or long-term economic growth.

Changing perceptions and providing more opportunities for younger people to stay (let alone settle and resettle) in the area will help to mitigate these issues, as well as other challenges - such as the increased pressure placed on healthcare services by ageing populations. Culture, heritage and tourism are useful tools to deploy to help address these challenges.

"Babergh & Mid Suffolk is the white space of Suffolk."

Stakeholder comment

ON THE CULTURE, HERITAGE & TOURISM SECTORS

These sectors were greatly impacted by the pandemic, but is slowly beginning to recover. In Babergh, workforce data shows that the rate of employment in arts, entertainment & recreation is increasing at a much faster rate compared to the East of England or England as a whole. Mid Suffolk is seeing recovery in line with the regional and national average.

Both districts will need continued support to accelerate visitor economy recovery from the impacts of the pandemic, as well as the current economic challenges. (This may be despite some perceptions of seasonal and lower-paid work that may inhibit staff recruitment and retention and career choices.) For Babergh, this is good news. Clearly the trend for domestic travel, driven by factors such as the pandemic and a desire for sustainable tourism, is benefitting the area. The good climate, coastline, landscape, and historic wool towns are already attractors for visitors, and investments in visitor offers such as the Suffolk Food Hall, Jimmy's Farm and the emerging wine industry are providing new offers resulting in new jobs and sector growth.³

And the link with culture and heritage is clear, with a focus on the visual arts heritage providing opportunities for growth and recovery. Gainsborough's House's reopening provides a focus around which the sector can collaborate. The rebrand and relaunch of the Food Museum offers similar opportunities. Further transformational investments at Benton End and the John Peel Centre for Creative Arts add to the positive picture. National Trust Flatford is also undergoing a redevelopment process, as is St Peter's Church in Sudbury. As these assets renew in the next few years, and with the right support behind them, this trajectory of growth should continue.

¹ Census 2021 data

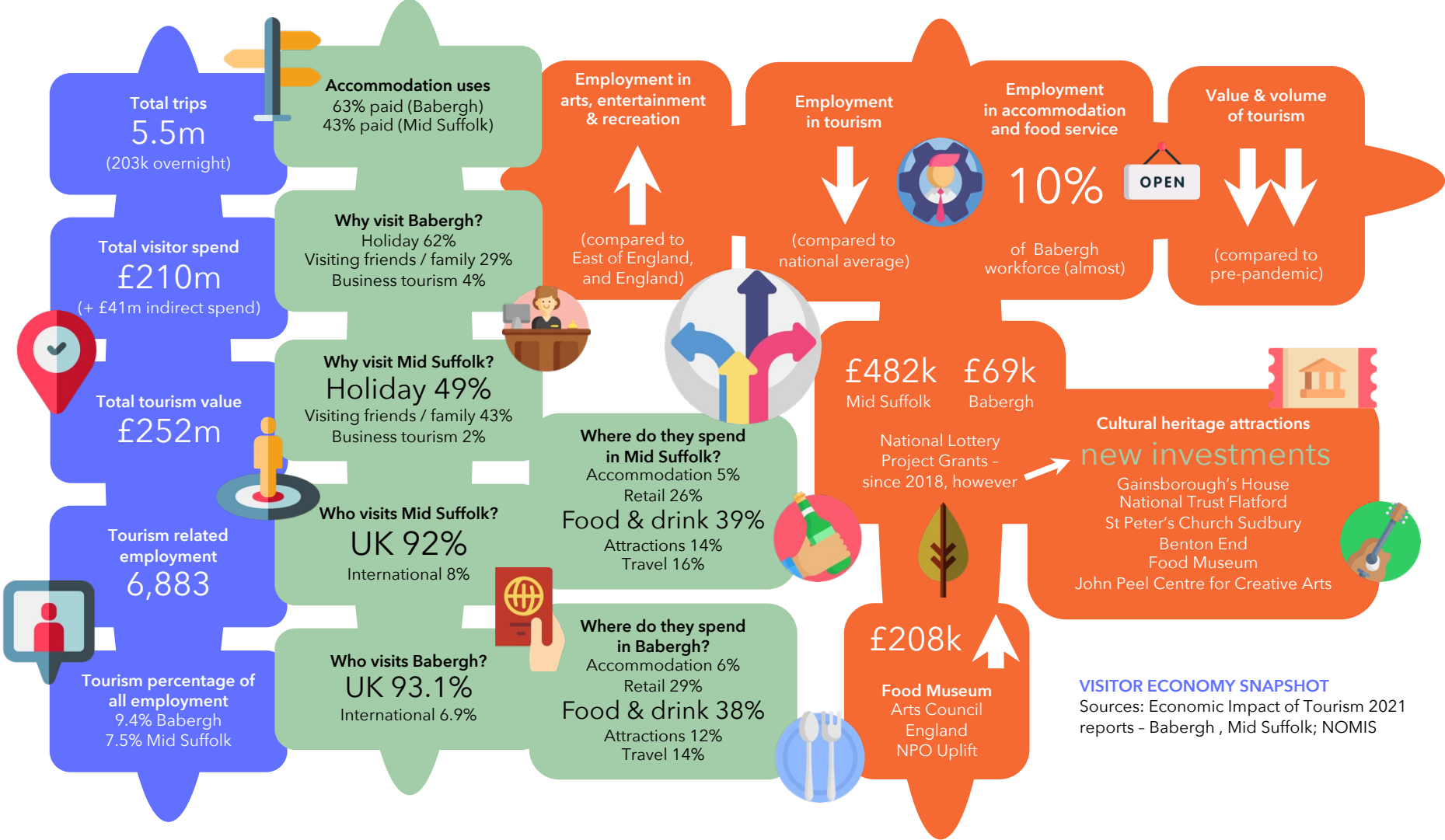
² South Norfolk has one of the highest increases of under 15s nationally, at 11.8%

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2022/nov/19/salt-flats-and-autumn-sun-a-car-free-break-on-suffolks-shotley-peninsula>



JOHN PEEL CENTRE FOR CREATIVE ARTS

Founded in honour of one of Stowmarket's most famous residents, the arts centre provides a community-owned venue for high quality, eclectic live performance. The venue is a mecca for contemporary and emerging performers within the East of England region, with the cache of John's name attracting the likes of 'BBC Introducing' music nights. The Centre is also home to a number of community organisations which offer participatory programmes and classes which support residents' social needs and wellbeing. Plans for expansion will improve its visibility and frontage, as well as help revitalise a unit on the high street.



Mid Suffolk has some catching up to do. Without the coastline, and without as many developed visitor assets, it could be perceived that there are fewer reasons for visitors to go. This is a problem with positioning and investment in the sector. The Heart of Suffolk brand is largely unused, but there is merit in a united voice and offer for the sub-region. There are new cultural and heritage investments. Stowmarket’s cultural group is working together to secure grants and integrate culture, heritage and tourism infrastructure in order to help with the town’s placemaking priorities.

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The rebrand and refocus of the Food Museum will take time to fully reach its potential as a national museum – but it is on the right path and has the right level of ambition. Primadonna Festival brings the highest quality of inclusive programming to the area each Summer, but has not fully integrated with its local communities yet. Beyond Stowmarket, there are individual organisations working hard to do the right thing, but facing challenges in recognition, collaboration and partnership opportunities, and securing investment. The Bank Arts Centre in Eye and Wingfield Barns spring to mind as good examples of organisations with the very best intentions, yet working in relative isolation. There is a lack of critical mass to help create any clustering or agglomeration impacts.

Having said this, Mid Suffolk is leagues ahead of Babergh in terms of securing Arts Council England investment. The only National Portfolio Organisation for the area is the Food Museum, which received an uplift of over £208k this round and more than doubled its previous investment. Looking at National Lottery Project Grants, since 2018 Mid Suffolk organisations and freelancers have secured over £482k compared to Babergh’s £69k.⁴ This is a significant imbalance which suggests that the cultural workforce as a whole in Babergh is less confident with – or competent at – grant funding applications. However, there are hugely significant success stories as well. Since 2018, Gainsborough’s House secured a £5m National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, in addition to further awards from trusts and foundations, and £431k from Arts Council England.

This is a skills gap, which is addressed in this strategy. It could be suggested that the workforce in Babergh is more commercially successful, and therefore there are lessons to be learned in Mid Suffolk about improving earned income.

Both districts are home to a handful of museums and heritage centres, about half of which are accredited. Very few of the museums are of a level which will attract visitors in any great volume, but instead play an important role in preserving local heritage and community life, as well as providing opportunities



PRIMADONNA FESTIVAL

Primadonna Festival takes place in July at the Food Museum. Billed as ‘the world as it should be’ the Festival of books, ideas and inspiration offers a creative programme focused on women, people of colour, working class people, LGBTQI+ and disabled people. The programme could include more community engagement to boost local ownership. Most of Suffolk’s festivals are in the bigger towns or on the coast, but Babergh & Mid Suffolk’s festival offer could be expanded and used as vehicles for skills development and community engagement.

⁴ Data from the Arts Council England website. The funding picture is more complex than NPO awards of course.

for volunteering that promote wellbeing. County and regional players are also very important to the cultural heritage provision across the districts, such as Share Museums East, Suffolk Museums and equivalent arts networks. Suffolk Libraries is an innovative service, playing a highly active role in culture – which Arts Council England recognised when they awarded the service NPO status. Other significant cultural organisations like Eastern Angles and DanceEast bring high-quality cultural engagement, with partnership support from the district councils.

appreciate and enjoy the significance of the built heritage environment.

All of which connects town and villages to the countryside and riverways of the area. Commercially-run attractions and experiences add breadth and depth to the outdoor visitor offer, including high-quality farm parks – Baylam Rare Breeds, Jimmy’s Farm & Wildlife Park and Hollow Trees Farm. Slowing down from the rush of daily life (but still exploring) is well catered for, with numerous packaged breaks, notably for cycling (and now e-cycling). If the Suffolk climate should, on occasion, make outdoor activities less attractive, activity can move undercover with sporting attractions like Suffolk Ski & Leisure Centre and Anglia Indoor Karting.

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A swathe of stately homes, and historic houses and gardens, support the visitor market and a largely buoyant accommodation, wedding and events industry. Local estate owners combine with national organisations such as English Heritage and National Trust to make an enviable heritage portfolio. The landscape is an asset in general and specifically through a number of key agencies and the access, interpretation and visitor services they offer. Dedham Vale AONB provides this access for residents and visitors alongside RSPB and Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserves, and other facilities such as Alton Water (Anglian Water).

The local built historic environment is highly valued, with listed and non-designated heritage buildings greatly contributing to quality of place. Understanding the value of these buildings, and ensuring their protection and sustainability is of the utmost importance. The Councils have a role to play in supporting owners to find new uses for underutilised sites, in supporting commercial and environmental sustainability, and allowing visitors to better



SUFFOLK WILDLIFE TRUST

Suffolk Wildlife Trust utilises creative activities to engage wider audiences and target those who would not traditionally attend. Through activities such as forest and beach schools, art, dance and sound workshops, and a mural trail, they are building care for the environment through creativity. Additionally, they focus on building young people as volunteer activists to take action for wildlife wherever they live.

Image: Suffolk Wildlife Trust Youth Board

A2. INSIGHTS

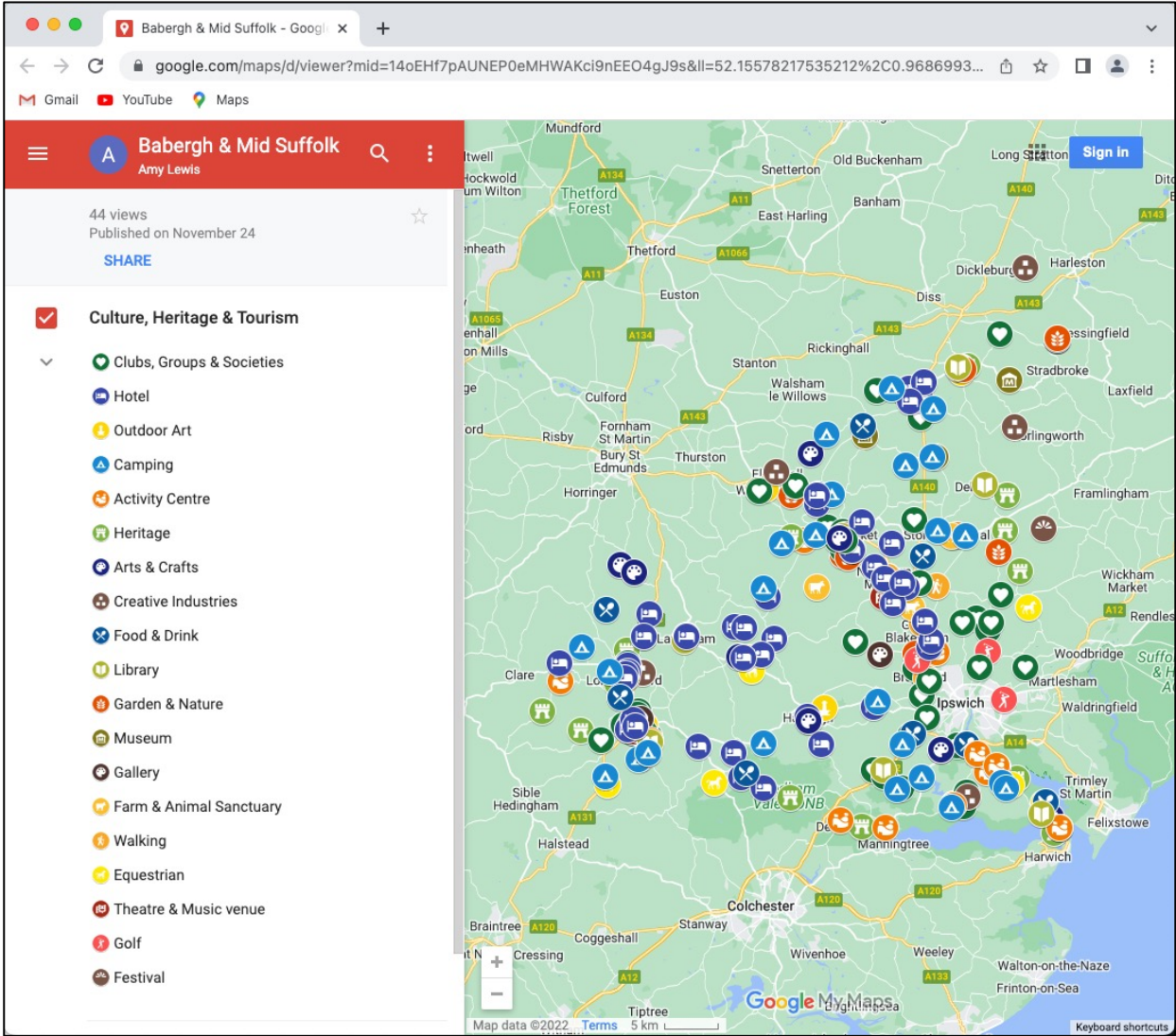
OVERVIEW

A supporting Insight Report has presented findings from a series of interviews, mini-workshop activity and a series of community and stakeholder engagement workshops (October - December 2022). Individual consultations were conducted with representatives from a variety of culture, creative, heritage, tourism, regeneration and other sectors. Sector workshops were conducted in Eye, Sudbury, Stowmarket and the Shotley Peninsula, attracting c.75 attendees from local organisations. A visitor survey generated 129 responses (12.2022 - 01.2023), which provided valuable insight into domestic target markets and post-pandemic attitudes. Desk research identified recent and current initiatives, helping to define Babergh & Mid Suffolk’s strengths and needs in a local, county and regional context.

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A dynamic online map of assets is available to continue to be populated at: <https://bit.ly/3WQvB8M>. With over 300 entries, it includes theatres, museums, heritage assets, arts centres, visitor attractions, creative infrastructure and supply chain, cinemas, events, music venues, community hubs, public art, visitor attractions and active lifestyle offer. This adds to the many useful maps already in use, such as Suffolk Heritage Explorer (heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/map).

This map is a starting point - to be built up and refined as a tool to identify and understand clusters and therefore how to respond through action planning.



SWOT ANALYSIS SUMMARY (ABRIDGED)

The SWOT analysis is a tried and tested tool but has lost none of its usefulness over the years. By contextualising the internal issues with those external issues that the Council has less influence over, practical routes forward can be derived.

Strengths & Weaknesses assess skills, resources, culture, historical factors, management, communications and so on - internal factors which are within the control and influence of the Council.

Opportunities & Threats cover governmental matters, wider funding issues, other organisations' behaviour and priorities and so on. These factors are external and normally beyond the scope of direct management and influence.

The chart addresses issues directly relating to arts & culture, heritage and tourism, and some elements will be related to wider policy and management issues, e.g. post-pandemic policy, masterplanning etc. Many smaller issues have arisen, but have not been included here in order to focus on the main topics.

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STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Landscape, environmental heritage; culture as foundation of local life 2. Contemporary heritage - visual arts, food & drink production, literature 3. Councils' role and relationships within Suffolk and region 4. 'Naturally' campaign, sustainable tourism, outdoor pursuits 5. Sense of place - relaxing, tranquil, soft, a place to (re)discover 6. Demonstrably strong stories and themes, e.g. food, ancient heritage, landscape, nature and pace of living 7. Accessibility to large domestic visitor markets 8. Investment in ambitious, nationally significant cultural assets e.g. Gainsborough's House, Food Museum 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A lack of cultural capital (e.g. skills, education, knowledge) within resident populations (who lack cultural entitlement / confidence) 2. Rural isolation and cultural poverty 3. Public transport and road networks slow / inhibit movement 4. Data collection and market insight; data-driven market and product development 5. Historic infrastructure for attractions to network, collaborate, share (between each other and for residents / visitors) 6. Lack of developed (bookable) experiences 7. Food and drink heritage flawed if field to table offer not fully realised, e.g. artisan food, markets, dining offer etc.

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clear appetite to build cultural capital with resident populations 2. Change in resident audience and visitor expectations post-pandemic 3. Development of a strong, structured regional destination management model 4. Development of a strong, structured sub-brand for Babergh & Mid Suffolk destination 5. Year round offer, winter offer, shoulder season and linking with residents 6. Contributing to managing regional over-tourism 7. Valley Ridge: potential game-changing development 8. Valley Ridge: place / destination positioning / image impact 9. Tap into spirit of piloting and managed risk taking, e.g. 'visiteering' packages 10. Emerging locally-driven infrastructure for attractions to network, collaborate, share 11. Regional visitor markets (e.g. Essex, London), promoting key themes (e.g. outdoors, cultural heritage, food) and new investments 12. Potential role of culture in place ambassadors programme 13. Case-making and demonstrable enabling of residents and communities to benefit from visitors, not just absorb the negative impacts (traffic, parking issues, litter, impact of seasonal fluctuations) - a civic pride approach 14. Screen tourism 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of collaboration across regional political boundaries, especially within Suffolk, e.g. Explore Suffolk 2. Lack of cross-sector working if not continually supported centrally (e.g. by Councils) 3. Cost of living crisis and securing a sustainable economic and funding model (even for non-chargeable offer) 4. National funding focus in other regions 5. Local destination competitiveness and lack of joint branding, marketing, use of data etc. 6. Low-wage economy across tourism and hospitality 7. Access to green space not being proactively incorporated into new developments, from towns 8. Continued challenges of local provision caused by rurality, e.g. lack of public transport and infrastructure, digital poverty, cultural poverty, social and rural isolation, lack of opportunities for young people etc. 9. Imbalance between resident and visitor needs

CULTURE PLACE WHEEL®

This wheel was populated at the end of the initial consultation phase, presenting a consultancy team view. Whilst subjective and indicative, it presents an assessment of where Babergh & Mid Suffolk is currently (allowing for variances including the pandemic) and where changes could be made and the impacts they could have with current plans and programmes in mind. This is very informative when looking at investment priorities, as well as the audience development potential - by volume, by motivation, by typology.

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The Wheel offers a 360° perspective across four categories:

- 1. *Working Environment* - Good practice all starts with a vision, and the strategic infrastructure to drive that vision forward.
- 2. *Working Partnerships* - The networks, consortia and shared objectives that will drive progress across a destination.
- 3. *Product Development* - A strong and diverse offer is the starting point, but it is the whole experience that counts.
- 4. *Market Development* - Reflecting the strategic development required across partners to support marketing.

The wheel sets out a rating for a number of audience-focused criteria (0-10, where 0 is extremely poor and 10 is perfection). The green line represents the current level of performance and the orange line presents the possible uplift from a successful development cycle in c.5 years' time post-investment or shift in approach - e.g. a new cultural strategy.

The white arrows highlight where marked changes - more transformational - are seen as achievable targets within the current plans. This is a districts-wide analysis. Clearly some programmes, venues and plans have a notable influence, but the (subjective) ratings seek to present a balanced view. The Insights Report carries further analysis, but in summary:

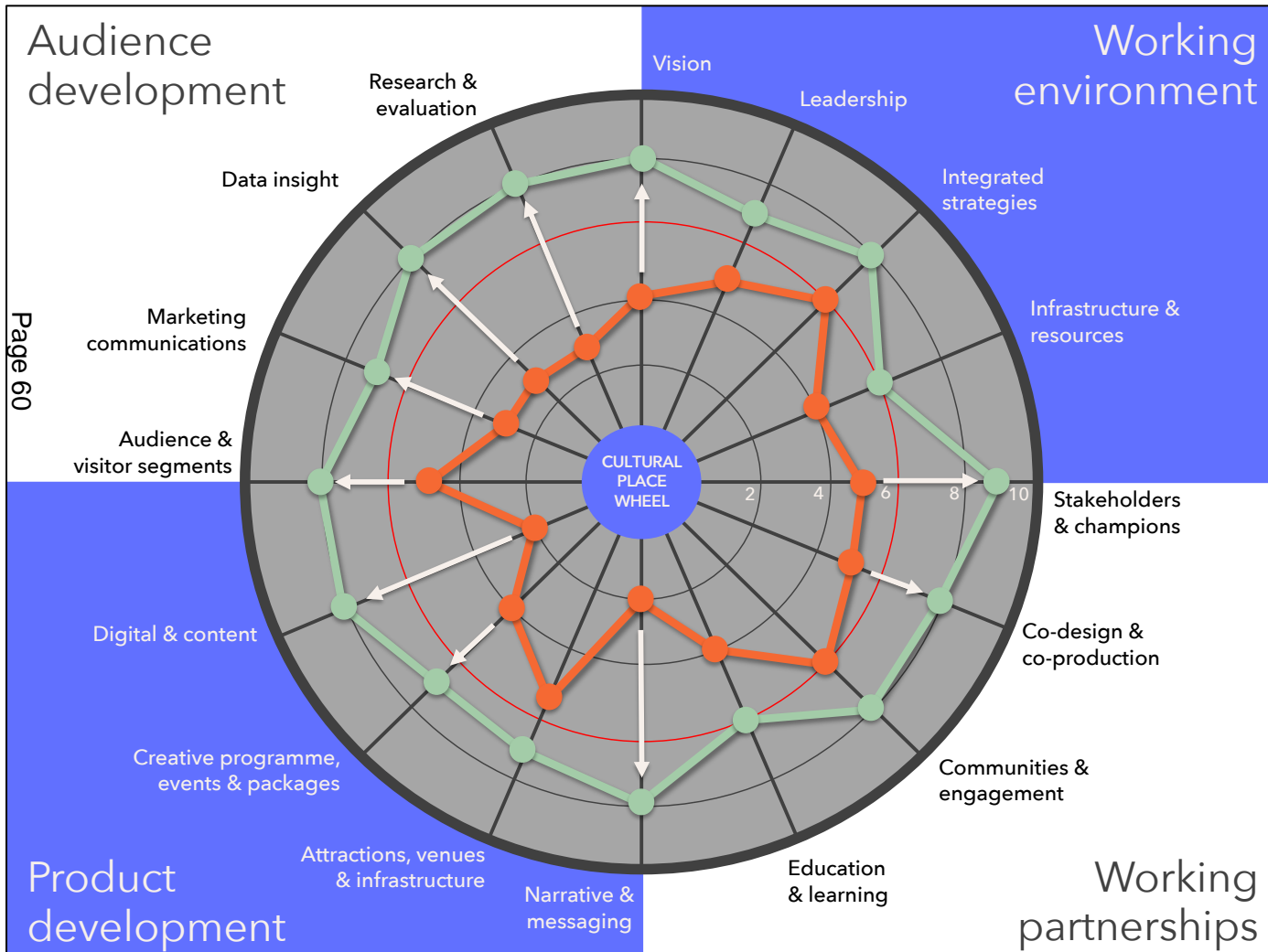
- 1. *Working Environment* - A lack of a unifying vision and clear forward plans should be able to be addressed through this Strategy, connecting to cross-cutting social and economic priorities.
- 2. *Working Partnerships* - There are some strong voices locally and regionally, but we need more. The emerging destination management organisation for the East of England is encouraging, but it is early days. Local culture-led groups - Stowmarket and Sudbury for example - are also welcome and should be supported.
- 3. *Product Development* - The districts (names) are political constructs, and lack the resonance and visibility that the county and individual towns and areas do. This should inform branding and marketing, as well as product development and packaging. This is just as important online and offline.
- 4. *Audience / Market Development* - Every marker can make a notable step forward during the next period. The offer is stronger than visitor performance historically suggests, and more can be done to respond to the large numbers that typically head of the coast. Data is weak, and a collaborative approach should be able to quickly accelerate improvements.



SPOTLIGHT: BROOKLYN BRAINERY - TEACHING ANYONE ANYTHING... SUGGESTIONS WELCOME

The Brainery is a space for accessible, community-driven, and crowdsourced education. Their slogan is "classes on anything and everything in NYC" with sessions ranging from personal development ("How to set goals") to practical skills ("Sourdough making from scratch") to the more obscure and specific artistic sessions ("Drawing Animals of the Renaissance") and informative lectures, ("The History of the Scottish Highlands"). All of the course topics are dreamed up and suggested by the public, with the teachers being drawn from around Brooklyn and the whole city.

How can culture fold into wider crafts, food & drink, digital and other education and training? Who could be a partner?



SPOTLIGHT: ROCHDALE UPRISING MURAL FESTIVAL - CONNECTING ART, HERITAGE & PLACE

"One of the core motives for running a mural festival in Rochdale is to inspire and engage the young people through direct visible action... turning the streets into a gallery that only inspires imagination. If someone had told me that I would have a career in muralism that would find me travelling all over the world... and having some of the richest life experiences I could imagine I never would have believed it... but the power is leading by example, seeing that in action and knowing it exists. Rochdale's famed pioneering spirit, heritage and people deserve to be celebrated in a vibrant and fitting way and we believe that these murals, workshops and events will encourage the community to feel a renewed pride, sense of ownership, inspiration for change and economic growth via tourism."

Hayley Garner, street artist, Nomad Clan

A3. THEMES

DEFINING THE THEMES

Articulating universal themes across culture, heritage and tourism can prove a challenge. It is people, place and their stories make the connections.

The aims, objectives and action plan will define each of the sectors and how they inter-relate. These three themes are important to frame the scale, scope and ambition of the Strategy. They speak directly to the need to build on successes and strengths, working together to make sustainable and progressive changes both district-wide and at local level.

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- Theme 1
Building cultural habits – improving the everyday experience of residents and visitors.
- Theme 2.1
Accelerating progress – developing the sector and its resilience.
- Theme 2.2
Accelerating progress – data, insight & digital transformation.
- Theme 3
Driving collaboration to evolve cultural heritage places and destinations.

THEME 1: BUILDING CULTURAL HABITS - IMPROVING THE EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE OF RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

The idea of making culture and heritage an everyday occurrence is not a new concept. Raymond Williams published his essay 'Culture is Ordinary' in 1958, and Cultural Education Partnerships in the UK have been delivering schemes to this effect since the late noughties. But if children do not grow up feeling confident and entitled to visit heritage sites and participate in cultural activities, then the 'habit' won't pass down to the next generation. Communities then develop where culture and heritage is for 'other' people to conserve, engage with and enjoy. They miss out.

"Mid Suffolk lacks heart because it doesn't make culture part of people's everyday lives."

Stakeholder comments

This can have a distancing effect on the tourist offer, separating the people, stories and cultural heritage from the visitor (and therefore the value of the visitor economy). This is a critical interdependence.

It is commonly understood that participating in culture, heritage (and by extension, visitor attractions) has many benefits - it helps to create understanding and build pride in the local community, it provides opportunities for social interaction, it improves health and wellbeing, it develops skills and so on. Making heritage



THE BANK ARTS CENTRE, EYE

The Bank Arts Centre is a not-for-profit community hub which prioritises creative opportunities to improve health, wellbeing and skills for locals. In addition, the digital hub in The Vault enables young people to develop digital creative skills sought after by local employers. On offer is a gaming hub, a sound recording studio, classes in visual and media arts, and a café. The newly appointed Arts Director will continue to grow its programme. There are no facilities of this type for miles around, meaning The Bank services the creative needs of a wide range of residents and provides a lifeline for residents with social and wellbeing needs. Supporting the development of The Bank Arts Centre will improve the cultural infrastructure of Mid Suffolk and increase its ability to deliver.

'everyday', making culture 'ordinary' - can help to deliver against all of these agendas which in turn builds resilient, successful people, places, economies and communities.

"Lots of beautiful and historic towns and villages, and lovely green countryside."

"Beautiful towns and villages, full of character and charm. Full of history - so much to do and see - something for everyone."

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Public survey comments

In a largely rural area, a lack of cultural habits becomes a more acute issue. Rural isolation can often equate to cultural poverty due to lack of access to assets, poor public transport infrastructure and so on. Babergh & Mid Suffolk are not areas of focus for national, strategic development, missing out on Government's Levelling Up funding schemes, and on the likes of Towns Fund and Arts Council's Creative People & Places programmes.

The Rural Creative Industries Forum estimates that rural creative industries contribute £2b to the UK economy⁵, largely without the strategic investment cited. Without strategic investment, finding ways to rebalance access to cultural experiences becomes more difficult, and more creative solutions must be found in order to realise the economic potential of the sector.

"The UK City of Culture has too narrow an [urban] focus... [it is] demonstrably clear that there [is] also a need to support rural, semi rural, and seasonal economies. Such places are home to about 50% of taxpayers, the ultimate funders of our public art bodies."

Yes to the Rural Cultural Economy? The UK City of Culture ... [has] too narrow a focus. Phil Redmond, Chair UK City of Culture panel, The Guardian, 2019

How do young people in rural communities develop their interest in these sectors? What latent creative potential is lost - and what is the social and economic cost of this loss, to the individual and to the place? Helping young people to build their cultural capital, and develop habits of engaging with these sectors, is key.

Just as young people living in rural communities will have fewer opportunities to develop skills which may result in creative careers, people of all ages will have fewer opportunities to participate in creative activities which could positively impact their health and wellbeing. The pandemic has exacerbated feelings of loneliness and isolation which may already be present for individuals living in rural communities. Babergh & Mid Suffolk

⁵ <http://www.ruralculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The%20New%20Creative%20Rural%20Economies.pdf>



HELMINGHAM HALL

Helmingham Hall, owned by the Tollemache family since 1480, has expanded its popular garden attraction into the winter months by developing an Illuminated Garden Trail which runs from mid November to mid December. With annual visitors now reaching 25,000, the event has reached maximum capacity in order to protect the Grade I listed gardens. This shows the demand for quality cultural events in the winter months. Haughley Park has also begun a Spectacle of Light event taking place in February. With Suffolk benefitting from the most clement climate in the country, increasing the outdoor events offer into the shoulder and off season could help ease visitor pressure in the summer and enable more local residents to enjoy local culture and heritage experiences.

District Council’s Residents Survey (2022) demonstrates that those residents who more regularly engage with their local sports, leisure, parks and open spaces offer correlates with those residents who experience better health and wellbeing, and feel proud of their communities.

Fortunately, Suffolk is a pioneer in creative health agendas, with Suffolk Artlink working with Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Partnership on social prescribing. They both sit on the Creative Wellbeing All Party Parliamentary Group.

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“There are no excuses for leaving talented people behind or for failing to back the full talent pool.”⁶

“You can whip up a huge amount of enthusiasm in schools, but it needs to be embedded at home.”

“Those small interactions provide structure to the week and reduce isolation. Local regular things are just as vital as bigger venues.”

Stakeholder comments

The NHS and Natural England are now championing ‘green’ social prescribing, again this is already being implemented in Suffolk through organisations such as the Green Light Trust. This great local approach should continue to be nurtured to enable as many

residents as possible to benefit from these schemes.

Volunteering is another vehicle for improved wellbeing. Within the culture and heritage sector volunteer roles are usually undertaken by older or retired people as it providing social interaction, intellectual stimulation and renewed sense of purpose. They also have more free time. Many museums have ‘volunteering for wellbeing’ schemes and this could be an area

“There’s a built-in resistance to change within schools. The staff are from the local area, and they grew up with the same insular attitudes which then reimposes itself within the education landscape.”

Stakeholder comment

of opportunity for local culture and heritage organisations to explore, which aligns with the outcomes cited in the Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils’ Wellbeing Strategy. This strategy seeks to put culture, heritage and tourism on the menu for residents in Babergh and Mid Suffolk; to change the expectations of everyday lived experiences.



SUFFOLK LIBRARIES

In 2012, Suffolk County Council made the bold decision to create an independent charity to run the library service. This has enabled the service to attract additional funding, and it became an ACE NPO in 2018 in recognition of its excellence in cultural programming. Across 45 sites, there are 48 trained cultural ambassadors who programme gigs, theatre, exhibitions, workshops and classes for their communities. The service understands its role in being a trusted cultural venue - embedded within and unique to its individual communities.

⁶ Culture Drives Impact - The Norfolk and Suffolk Culture Board Manifesto

“The Covid-19 pandemic has brutally exposed fragility in every area of society, causing immense suffering and exacerbating social and economic fragility. This shifts the focus for social, economic, educational and health policy and re-frames the role and value of culture in society.”⁷

“Covid has provided a fresh canvas. Audiences are behaving differently. It’s time to try new things.”

Stakeholder comment

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**THEME 2.1:
ACCELERATING PROGRESS - DEVELOPING THE SECTOR AND ITS RESILIENCE**

By eroding the gap between ‘residents’ and ‘visitors’, communities will build that vital pride in place, sense of belonging and value of their heritage. By building cultural habits, the foundations of the culture, heritage and visitor sector will be reinforced. This will ensure that residents value, appreciate – and critically, use – their local assets. And, wider social agendas around skills development, improved health and wellbeing, and rural / social isolation will be helped too. As individuals and their communities become better ambassadors for local culture and heritage, these interconnected sectors will collectively benefit from more confident, vibrant and better-informed communities.

“There’s a reticence, a modesty here. We don’t big up what’s special, we downplay things. It’s part of the personality. You have to dig to find pride in place. It’s not arrogant to be proud. We know why we like it here, and if you want to like it too, that’s great. But you don’t have to.”

Stakeholder comment

The visitor survey (conducted as part of strategy research) shows a clear brand perception of the Heart of Suffolk that is cosy, pretty and gentle, influenced by its big skies, built heritage environment and rolling countryside. Whilst this is a positive perception, it will have limited appeal for certain audiences, and is difficult to communicate as a point of differentiation, especially to international visitors who will perceive this as a typically English experience. The proximity to London, Gatwick and Harwich, and the associations with Gainsborough and Constable, provide touchpoints for international visitors to create impetus to visit. However, there are several areas which Babergh and Mid Suffolk could better exploit to generate a broader appeal to more audiences and diversify the visitor offer.

The outdoor pursuits offer is present, but at the moment is largely unmanaged and can cause issues for local residents and the

⁷ Culture Drives Impact - The Norfolk and Suffolk Culture Board Manifesto



CREATIVE WELLBEING ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP (APPG)

Suffolk Artlink and Britten Pears Arts sit on the Creative Wellbeing All Party Parliamentary Group alongside the local Integrated Care Partnership. Britten Pears Arts also hosts regular think tanks on this topic, such as singing for chronic pain. Given the local leadership, excellence and expertise in social prescribing and creative health, it would be sensible to explore ways to invest in and expand their programmes in order to address the health and wellbeing needs of more residents.

<https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/>

Image: Suffolk Artlink

environment. Paddle sports and wild swimming in the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley have become very popular, especially on sunny days and weekends. However, the volume of river traffic is creating conservation concerns, as well as a lack of management over licensing, which can create friction amongst residents with concerns over traffic, ASB and litter. These concerns can be mitigated by increased information, communication, planning and management.

Additionally, finding ways to encourage access on weekdays or in the cooler months would help disperse visitors in a way that becomes more manageable and mitigates the negative impacts. The proposed flagship Valley Ridge development, when

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“We have too many visitors, so we want to improve experience and engagement rather than attract higher numbers. Capacity is an issue.”

“For slow travel, we do it on Suffolk time.”

“Huge number of visitors have expectations about sustainable visits, which is currently a niche market.”

“Babergh and Mid Suffolk feels like you discovered it. Visitors want to keep feeling that sense of authenticity.”

Stakeholder comments

launched, will cement the reputation for outdoor and adventure activity throughout the year and bring new visitor markets to the region.

There are dark histories too, especially linking with Essex. The infamous Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins was born in Great Wenham and worked across the Eastern region profiting from the deaths of suspected witches. Fascination with him and his practices still invoke fear and horror today – and therefore, potential dark tourism. The popularity of Scaresville at Kentwell Hall evidences the demand for this type of grisly event.

“Quintessentially English, thatches, cottage gardens, coloured plasterwork, peaceful.”

“An area that is steeped in tradition, with modern additions. Picturesque views and buildings, with modern shopping facilities in the larger towns and cities. Plenty of unique places to visit and explore.”

Public survey comments

Screen tourism is already a good business in Babergh, especially with Lavenham featuring in the hugely popular Harry Potter film franchise. In East Anglia screen tourism can be worth up to £4.3m per site per annum.⁸ The upcoming Apple+ TV series Masters of



SPOTLIGHT: THE NATIONAL FOREST

In 2016, The National Forest decided to use culture and events to magnify and contemporise the message of its vital mission. After planting literally millions of trees, with millions more to go, it wanted to re-engage with its local communities and visitors in a way that communicated everything that they did and stood for. A rather pedestrian Wood Fair was replaced by a celebratory new festival – *Timber* – delivered in partnership with award-winning festival makers Wild Rumpus. The impact on local community engagement in this black-field part of the UK (former mining region) has been marked, and wider awareness, perception and interest in the National Forest has grown markedly as a result.

⁸ Visit East of England Destination Development Plan

Air, produced by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg, will provide further impetus for visitors, especially those from North America. When Band of Brothers aired, northern France saw a 40% increase in visitors. Babergh and Mid Suffolk must work collaboratively across its historic airfields, USAF and heritage sites to maximise the tourism potential of this major television series.

Sustainable tourism is another trend, already fuelling an increased domestic visitor market looking to reduce flights and car use. A recent YouGov survey shows that 32% of 'sustainable travellers' are aged 25-39 and have the disposable income to spend whilst travelling. They like to be active and 'off the beaten track'. This is a ripe opportunity for Babergh and Mid Suffolk; the good cycle and walking paths, as well as the local train services, enable a slow-paced and car-free visit⁹. The perception of 'Sleepy Suffolk' can be reframed into 'Sustainable Suffolk'.

Food production as both heritage and contemporary practice provides huge opportunity for tourism, and for sustainable tourism. The idea of the '15-mile meal' can be a reality in Suffolk.

The burgeoning wine industry, especially around the Shotley peninsula and all along the Stour Valley, allows for new visitor markets to explore the produce that is almost unique to this region within the UK. Suffolk Food Hall and Jimmy's Farm both work to promote quality local produce and 'field to fork' experiences. As visitors explore the Food Museum in Stowmarket, they can taste and experience how food is made, and understand the heritage of production.

"You can't move for cheese-mongers round here, everyone is producing something."

"We all eat. Food is culture and is an avenue for everyday creativity. Our collection is rooted in East Anglia and we use it to tell broad and inclusive stories."¹⁰

"You can't walk out your door without falling over a new vineyard."

Stakeholder comments

There are relatively few destination restaurants in the region, but the sheer volume of artisanal producers is the point of differentiation. Provenance, and quality, matters. Just as Cumbria has become a destination for fine dining, and the Ribble Valley is Lancashire is known for its gastro-pubs, Babergh and Mid Suffolk could become a destination for sustainably sourced food tourism. The area is ripe for a campaign for restaurateurs, hoteliers, local producers and visitor attractions to work collaboratively to promote the quality of local produce combined with low food mileage, with an events and activity programme running alongside. Small changes could have a big impact, and support a circular food economy. The home of the national Food Museum clearly would benefit from further developing a complementary food offer.

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2022/nov/19/salt-flats-and-autumn-sun-a-car-free-break-on-suffolks-shotley-peninsula>
¹⁰ <https://foodmuseum.org.uk/about/>



FOOD MUSEUM

A bold rebrand from the former Museum of East Anglian Life, the new and refreshed Food Museum is set in 84 acres with access from Stowmarket's town centre. As the UK's only museum which focuses on food, a visit to the Food Museum is a full sensory experience: crops, animals, tastings, demonstrations. The museum is community-focused with a variety of partnerships with other arts, culture and community organisations. There are a dynamic range of events and activities linked to food, environment and nature. The Food Museum is taking all the right steps to become the nationally significant museum it aspires to be.

“You don’t get big collaborative ideas between the heritage sector here, there’s never a joined-up offer.”

Stakeholder comment

Another threat to this sector is the current economic crisis. With less disposable income, people will more carefully consider their leisure spending. ‘Trips and treats’ will become harder to justify as purse strings tighten. The sectors has responded well to asks around becoming ‘Warm Spaces’. However, heritage buildings are notoriously difficult to heat and the sector operates on low incomes and grants already. The increase in costs will not only affects visitor consumption patterns, but also increase operating costs.

Some sites around the country have already had to close, such as Nottingham Castle and Eastleigh Museum, and many are making redundancies or closing more areas to the public. This fundamentally affects the cultural fabric of the UK, in both the short and long term. There are plenty of ways to respond to this challenge, none of which are a silver bullet but must be part of an overall response. Heritage buildings and landscapes must be able to easily install sustainable infrastructure (e.g. solar panels, EV charging points) without facing huge costs and challenges from planners. In order to protect the future of cultural audiences, providing free entry on certain days throughout the year could enable visitors to attend who otherwise would not be able to afford to visit.

The combined impact of national circumstances such as Brexit, the pandemic and the cost of living crisis means that there is a shortage of skilled workers, especially in tourism. In the culture and heritage sectors, volunteers tend to fill roles such as front of house. The recent Kickstart scheme managed by the Association for Suffolk Museums was a great example of providing paid employment for young people interested in pursuing a career in heritage. In the visitor economy, young people have traditionally filled these roles. But they are no longer willing or able to afford to run a car (public transport being unavailable, especially for evening or weekend shifts) and live on the low pay offered. A seismic shift is necessary – to improve pay and conditions for workers, to improve job stability and career progression opportunities, and to improve perceptions of careers within these sectors – which are often thought of as ‘stop gaps’ rather than aspirational. Schemes such as the pilot VENI programme at West Suffolk College will start to tackle these challenges through partnerships between educators and employers, to develop skilled workers in the visitor economy.

“Why don’t young people go into the trade? Because they’re boring jobs, badly paid, not enough buzz, working with older visitors.”

Stakeholder comment

All of these factors will help to develop and build resilience within these sectors, which are disproportionately affected by external challenges but can also disproportionately contribute to other



THE PIN MILL STUDIO

A lovely facility on the stunning Shotley peninsula, The Pin Mill Studio offers photography and painting courses as well as a commercial photographic studio for commissioned work.

The location also offers a photography art gallery and cafe with with constant inspiration for professionals and amateurs alike as well as contributing to the visitor offer - for example, through the Arthur Ransome walking trail. The studio was established by two photographers moving out of London for a better family life; demonstrating the attractiveness of Suffolk for creatives looking to establish their practice and businesses.

agendas around regeneration, economic growth, improved health and wellbeing and vibrant communities. Investment into schemes which improve, build and grow these sectors will realise benefits not only for the sectors themselves but for the economy and community as a whole. Culture-led regeneration is a well-known tool and driver for inward investment, and forms the basis of New Anglia LEP's 'Culture Drives Impact' strategy for inclusive and sustainable growth. The opportunities provided through the newly announced Rural England Prosperity Fund allocations, especially in relation to rural tourism, can help Babergh and Mid Suffolk capitalise on opportunities identified in this strategy and address issues such as lack of (diverse) accommodation in the area.

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"If you support creative industries then it will pay back for the long term and will generate ancillary spend."

"Culture-led development is the only game in town. Retail is not the future. Experiences are."

Stakeholder comment

"A rural quite traditionally English area with many olde world villages to explore. Some have many beautiful buildings and churches to enjoy walking around in the peace and quiet these places afford away from the hustle and bustle of larger busier towns."

Public survey comments

**THEME 2.2:
ACCELERATING PROGRESS - DATA, INSIGHT & DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION**

Throughout the engagement process, we heard over and over again that these sectors have issues with promoting their activities and residents struggle to know what's on. Some of this is due to the older population and rural nature of the districts creating digital poverty, meaning that many people will still want newspaper adverts and posters on village notice boards. But much of it is due to an overly complex, underfunded and ineffective destination management system. The former Heart of Suffolk brand had merit in trying to create a cohesive identity for the region. Many towns have closed their visitor information centres (a national trend), reducing the infrastructure to promote activities and events. The likes of Love Lavenham and Visit Hadleigh provide excellent local information and bring together local businesses, but cannot reach beyond relatively local audiences. Visit Suffolk is under resourced, and sits under Visit East of England, which also runs the Head East brand. There are also other town-based destination management initiatives

"Babergh and Mid Suffolk is clunky, it doesn't have a cohesive identity."

"As a resident I've always thought that there isn't enough promotion of existing assets on our doorstep."

Stakeholder comments



FLATFORD (NATIONAL TRUST)

Flatford is one of the biggest visitor attractions in the region, preserving and celebrating Constable's famous views and the artistic heritage of the Stour Valley. The National Trust site welcomes over 150k visitors pa. The new development at the Granary will enable an enhanced visitor experience and understanding of the Constable story. However, like many places in the Dedham Vale AONB, there are issues with over-tourism at times. Finding ways to better spread visitors across the week and year would enable a better visitor experience as well as ease conservation and environmental issues for Flatford and the surrounding areas.

of varying quality and reach (through no fault of their own). But it can be confusing for prospective visitors and spreads impact too thinly. Independent commercial voices are not prominent.

Covid-19 has accelerated changes in consumer behaviour that have been building in recent years. It has driven more consumers online. Travel providers and distributors have been forced to explore new product categories, audiences, marketing channels, skills and working practices, policies, technologies, and even business models.

Research indicated that while many experienced suppliers are aware of the need for digital transformation, they are being held back by underpowered booking systems and websites, and also by gaps in digital content, knowledge, skills, and budgets.

The failure to adopt online distribution to connect with markets is making operators less efficient and making it more difficult for to measure and optimise performance. These weaknesses also affect the customer experience - by limiting the ability of consumers and the travel trade to discover, book, and bundle live inventory through internet-connected channels.

We can summarise barriers to digital transformation under four main headings:

1. **Capacity:** businesses lack digital assets such as people (especially staff with digital skills and knowledge), properties such as websites, booking and distribution platforms, performance data, and digital processes or policies. Without these digital assets, businesses do not have the capacity to scale up, to increase efficiency, or to meet changing customer needs. Digital transformation depends on finding these capacity gaps or traps, and on finding ways to plug or release them. Outside direction, support, or funding may be required to kickstart the digital transformation process while promoting a diverse and high-quality culture, heritage and tourism offer.
2. **Capability:** Some providers and distributors have no specialist digital staff, no online systems, no websites, and are not delivering any online marketing or communications. These gaps are relatively easy to identify. Others already have basic digital assets in place - a staff member who manages social media, for instance, or an online appointments system, or a brochure-style website. Whether the businesses are aware of it or not, however, their assets may not be fit-for-purpose in terms of changing customer needs and behaviours or of a changing competitive landscape.



(MORE THAN) WOOL TOWNS

These historic towns are quintessentially English. Some of the best-preserved mediaeval settlements are here. Grand timber frames and colourful paintwork charm residents and visitors alike. Lavenham, an archetypal Wool Town has over 340 listed buildings, leading to it becoming 'Godric's Hollow' in the Harry Potter film series. The screen tourism industry is growing. Location scouts are attracted by the wealth of natural and built heritage. The heritage offer plays a vital role in the celebration of local stories, building pride in place. Openness to filming and screen tourism provides a contemporary relevance for wider audiences - but the Wool Town story should not be lost in the limelight!

3. **Cost:** Most businesses, before they spend their own money on digital advertising, content, or resources, may first want to see evidence that those investments will deliver a positive return. As they carry on with under-powered websites that do not represent the quality of their products and that do not convert users into customers, businesses risk losing revenue to more digitally-capable competitors. Or in the case of tours, activities, and attractions visitors may simply experience less of Suffolk on their trip - resulting in reduced economic impact and (because visitors are less satisfied) lower rates of retention and referral. In order for a programme of digital transformation to become sustainable, it needs to ensure that industry can obtain data that demonstrates the impact and financial value of transformation efforts.

4. **Culture:** Digital transformation is about changing culture. It's about looking at the qualities that are valuable to customers and using digital systems and processes to reinforce and enhance these qualities. Digital transformation is about changing how organisations work. Support programmes will need to provide oversight and direction, to ensure that businesses are able to frame their digital transformation ambitions in ways that reflect changes in consumer behaviour, travel markets, and technology.

"I know I need to sort out my website, but I don't have time. I would love to have an online ticketing system, integrated mailing lists, digital transformation. We're stuck in the past but it's expensive and time consuming so I would need to contract someone to deliver it for me, and I can't afford that."

"We direct our marketing to Essex, because they invest in and support the culture, heritage and visitor economy. I don't bother with Suffolk."

Stakeholder comments

These issues are regional (in fact global) and a programme to address them should be looking at at least county level, if not to East Anglia. However, Babergh and Mid Suffolk is more vulnerable to these challenges than its neighbours, since it lacks urban conurbations or natural clusters which might create collective interest from prospective visitors (e.g. Suffolk Coast). Without the brand recognition of a destination, and without a prominent digital presence, it is hard for visitors to find out about Babergh and Mid Suffolk and inspire them to book a visit. If Babergh and Mid Suffolk were to lead a programme like this in partnership with other districts, centred around the cultural and heritage sector, it would potentially have the most to gain.



JIMMY'S FARM

Jimmy's Farm & Wildlife Park is a visitor attraction which promotes farming, conservation, and field to fork food. As well as exotic species, the Farm is home to a variety of rare breeds, for example, the Suffolk Punch horse which is so rare it is classed as Critically Endangered. A full range of workshops are available which are directly related to the curriculum, from nursery to further education, and for a variety of subject areas. The Farm is building an events programme which includes cultural experiences such as jazz music, ballroom dancing and wellness walks.

**THEME 3:
DRIVING COLLABORATION TO EVOLVE CULTURAL HERITAGE
PLACES AND DESTINATIONS**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk do not have a strong identity in destination terms. There is a relative lack of infrastructure, especially compared to the Suffolk Coast. It lacks a strong destination brand. Babergh and Mid Suffolk is a relatively anonymous, blank canvas. Rather than perceiving this as a negative thing, it can be seen as an advantage. This strategy proposes that Babergh and Mid Suffolk take an approach of being a 'good neighbour' and refute the reputation of being a 'poor cousin.' The district councils and local partners work across geographical boundaries to deliver their plans. Developing this collaborative mindset further with neighbouring districts and counties will allow Babergh and Mid Suffolk to realise more potential for its assets and communities.

For example, Mid Suffolk will never compete with the popularity of the East Anglian coast. But most visitors must travel through Mid Suffolk to get to the sea. By working with neighbours, and creating joined up itineraries and visitor offers, value can be created.

There are themes ripe for development which would support cultural tourism. The visual arts heritage, as already mentioned, is rich and links to the uniqueness of place. The landmark reopening of Gainsborough's House, the upcoming developments at

National Trust Flatford, and the planned reopening of Benton End, provide a more cohesive visitor offer which will allow the very best of British painting to be understood and enjoyed within a manageable weekend break. Crossing district boundaries again, developing the partnership with Colchester & Ipswich Museums service is a natural one, given their huge collections of Gainsborough and Constable. The connection between Benton End and the Ipswich Art School is another good example.

And there are further angles to be taken: the liberal, radical queer history of the East Anglian School and its students; and local, contemporary visual arts practice and how it is influenced by place.

The exploitation of these through packages, trails and itineraries would diversify the visitor offer and therefore create more resilience within the sector. There are other ways to support this as well, which will be necessary to fully realise the potential of these interconnected sectors. Creating the infrastructure for networking and collaboration will generate more partnerships, deepen understanding and share best practice. Given the large geographical footprint and challenges of public transport, networking events may have to include online and in-person options. Some individual towns have recently started their own collaborative networks, notably Stowmarket Culture Forum and Sudbury Culture Group. But these are in larger conurbations



GAINSBOROUGH'S HOUSE

This represents a jewel in the area's heritage and tourism crown. Now it has been boosted by a major capital investment - a superb extension and redisplay elevates its anchor attraction for Sudbury and the surrounding area. It also reconnects with the strong visual art heritage alongside Constable, Benton End and other places/

The challenge now is to make the connections that enable visitors to plan a cultural itinerary visit, and for locals to access the creative and social resources that the venue now offers to a national standard.

“There is an artistic heritage worth celebrating.”

“Many artists and writers have lived and worked here over time, but they are seen as individuals, but not as a cluster or movement. We should be championing the region as a centre of landscape to abstraction art.”

Stakeholder comments

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where there is more critical mass of culture, heritage and creative businesses. Ensuring that rural organisations are part of the conversation is important. Additionally, working across geopolitical boundaries within the county and across county lines will be essential in order to help Babergh and Mid Suffolk realise its full potential, where itineraries and partnerships align. For example, no tour of Constable Country can ignore Christchurch Mansion, despite it being in Ipswich; and the local visual arts heritage should include Alfred Munnings, despite the Munnings Art Gallery being located in Essex.

The infrastructure of culture, heritage venues and visitor attractions is growing. Until recently, it has been largely volunteer-run groups, very small organisations, and then very commercial attractions and historic properties run by major players like the National Trust. The subsidised sector, usually the tier which has both the capacity and the agenda to progress sector

development and new initiatives, is only just beginning to reach a level at which it can have impact.

There are smaller venues, such as the John Peel Centre for Creative Arts, The Bank Arts Centre in Eye and Wingfield Barns, which have the right ambition to step into this tier, but require organisational development to do so. Looking across the region, there could be venues in neighbouring districts and counties which could provide peer support, ‘buddying’ or mentoring to help accelerate the development of these organisations which show potential. Similarly, working cross-sector would help to build an experience economy.



WINGFIELD BARNs

The majority of their audiences either come from within a 5 mile radius, or from over 20 miles away; this demonstrates the quality of their programming is enough to encourage people to travel whilst also serving a hyperlocal audience. They see rural isolation as no reason to experience cultural poverty. Wingfield makes the most of their beautiful location through new partnerships, such as writing residencies with HighTide Theatre. However, the rural location makes profitability difficult, which discourages risk-taking or programming new work. This is indicative of how the cost of living crisis intersects with rural isolation and can curtail cultural opportunity.

In memory of Lee Dunford

27th & 28th May 2017
MELFORD HALL IN SUFFOLK

LEESTOCK

Music Festival

In aid of
willow
special days for seriously ill young adults

Saturday 27th May

NEWTON FAULKNER

Whippersnappers * **TINCHY STRYDER**

DJ JACK RABBIT SLIM'S
KYPEN MOBILE SUPER FURRY PARTY

PACIFIC+ **THROPTOWN MONOTONES+** **SWEET MACHETE+** **Hu!** **THE BRINK+** **SURGE+** **MASSIVE ATTACK**

Sunday 28th May

toploader

THE JELLYCATS + **goldie lookin chain** + **the bunnys**
rachael sage + **GG** + **walkvay** + **Tom Sanderson**

Phoebe flustin + **Elephant In the Room** + **GABBY RIVERS**

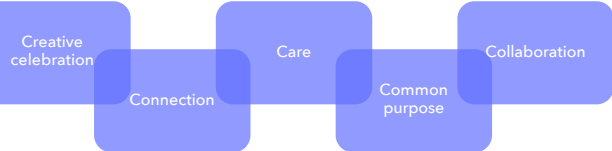
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B1. VISION STATEMENT

1.1 TOWARDS A POWERFUL CULTURAL VISION

This agenda for what cultural leadership needs to look like in Babergh & Mid Suffolk reflects the views of key stakeholders all across the Districts (and wider county and region), including the Councils. The essence of what we have heard from everyone we spoke to, who are all heavily invested in Babergh & Mid Suffolk’s future cultural, heritage and visitor economy success, was the vital importance of these dominant interlocking values:

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Celebrate the offer, connect it, care for and preserve the cultural heritage, with common purpose, and do it all collaboratively. And crucially, these values are a clarion call for the development of a clear long-term vision and accompanying set of ambitions.

Ambition not for grand new cultural institutions or international marketing campaigns, as nice as those would be. But rather clear ambitions for how culture, heritage and the visitor economy can combine in order to enrich the lives of people who live in Babergh & Mid Suffolk, and enrich the experiences of those who visit, The Strategy aims to create new connections and opportunities as a means to generate positive social and economic impacts for and with communities, businesses and stakeholders.

Engagement with culture, heritage and creativity is the soil out of which new ideas, jobs, innovative practices, movements and moments can grow – professionally, personally, as individuals and as place-based communities.

Therefore, the vision of this Cultural, Heritage & Visitor Economy Strategy is:

Set in a landscape of enduring inspiration, we will work together to create distinctive, welcoming, and vital cultural places and experiences that energise our communities, our enterprises and our visitors to embrace the progressive heart of Suffolk.

This draws on the landscape that has defined the culture, food and arts of the region for millennia. It makes it clear that this project is a joint one – across districts, towns and villages, but also sectors and agendas. The Suffolk pace and perspective on life is an influence, creating a warm welcome, time to renew and space to be creative.

The vision strikes a balance between local residents, businesses and organisations – who may associate much more with their town or village than a district or region – and the visitor economy which should be complementary to communities, supporting the economy and local services.



SPOTLIGHT: CREATIVE ‘HUB’ COLCHESTER

Creative Colchester is all about progress through partnership and sector leadership – across culture, digital and creative industries. As a hub, they share, promote, consult, signpost, review, recommend, advocate. And most importantly they seek to follow through as a partner on delivery projects and other initiatives. Colchester has strength in depth: 4 NPOs and over 3,500 creative businesses, 2021’s Art Fund Museum of the Year (Firstsite). Advocacy and collaboration works. Colchester is recognised as the Creative, Cultural and Digital Hub for North Essex, by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) and as a creative cluster, as well as being recognised in the government’s Industrial Strategy Sector Deal for the Creative Industries.

A close-up photograph of a young child with blonde hair, smiling and holding a large, fresh bunch of vegetables. The child is wearing a light-colored t-shirt. The vegetables include several large, dark-skinned potatoes, several bright orange carrots, and various green leafy vegetables like asparagus and leafy greens. The background is a soft-focus field of green plants, likely a vegetable patch or farm. The overall tone is bright and natural.

Set in a landscape of enduring inspiration, we will work together to create distinctive, welcoming, and vital cultural places and experiences that energise our communities, our enterprises and our visitors to embrace the progressive heart of Suffolk.

B2. SHARED PRINCIPLES

OUR SHARED PRINCIPLES

In taking forward the development and delivery of this Strategy, we commit to work together, across places, districts, agendas and sectors to:



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Embed **collaborative practices** as all partners work together in developing the new initiatives and responses required by this strategy.

Identify, recognise and support the **potential for creativity** and talent to transform lives and places.

Adopt a **strengths-based approach** in all we do, seeking to foster and empower both established and untapped talent and resources across our districts.

Foster **sustainable development** in Babergh & Mid Suffolk, defined in terms of net carbon neutrality and the creation of sustainable jobs and employment firmly footed within the region.

Ensure **co-created processes** shape how we deliver against key priorities, embedding agency and insight from local communities, audiences and artists.

Be **data informed**, combining local knowledge with a careful analysis of relevant data and other local sources of cultural & creative industry, heritage, visitor economy and wider regeneration-based evidence.

Commit to measurable change, framing our action plans in ways that will allow **effective progress assessment** in short, medium and long-term.

"If cultural activities are to play a strategic role in supporting urban regeneration initiatives, many new kinds of partnership will be needed - between departments and disciplines, between the public and private sectors and, critically, with the voluntary sector and community organisations."

The Art of Regeneration: Urban Renewal through Cultural Activity, Charles Landry, Lesley Greene, Francois Matarasso, Franco Bianchini.

B3. STRATEGIC AIMS & OBJECTIVES

AIM 1:
BABERGH & MID SUFFOLK WILL SUPPORT ITS RESIDENTS TO LIVE FULL CULTURAL LIVES, BUILDING CULTURAL CONFIDENCE AND CIVIC PRIDE.

OBJECTIVES

1. Develop initiatives which enable residents to form connections, experience their local area, and relate to its identity better more fully.
2. Babergh & Mid Suffolk Councils will provide development and support services for cultural and heritage organisations which enable them to realise their potential.
3. Support the LCEP, increasing opportunities for school pupils to learn from local practising artists and creatives, and supporting teachers to develop their professional experience.
4. Increase opportunities for participation and training in cultural and heritage activities, particularly for residents without a background of cultural engagement.
5. Building as standard an approach to cultural programming which includes skills development and work experience opportunities.

6. Support green social prescribing initiatives which enable residents to better connect with landscape, culture and heritage, and including better training and support for organisations hosting prescribed patients.
7. Explore 'volunteering for wellbeing' schemes.
8. Support burgeoning place-based cultural forums to develop and deliver their ambitions.
9. Support and facilitate the development of an events strategy which is 'of place' and grows local talent.
10. Improve facilities, communications and activities which enable marginalised groups to participate in culture and heritage activities (e.g. Changing Places secured funding for accessible toilet facilities).



PERISCOPE LCEP

Periscope is the Local Cultural Education Partnership working across Babergh, Mid Suffolk and Bury St Edmunds, which aims to build connections between schools and arts, culture and creative industries. Tiny Plays, Big Ideas was a project where school students worked together to develop plays, which were then performed by professional actors on stage at the Theatre Royal. This was a great project for the students, but it also invited parents & guardians into the theatre to see their children's work, thereby building cultural engagement across the family unit.

AIM 2:

THE CULTURE, HERITAGE AND VISITOR ECONOMY SECTORS WILL BE SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT AND WILL CHAMPION THE REGION'S DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES.

OBJECTIVES

1. Embed Babergh & Mid Suffolk's 'sense of place', brand values and personality - with a new singular destination brand name based on the 'heart of Suffolk' that more local places can use to present the variety of the visitor offer. This then can provide a gateway to more specific sub-brands, like Constable Country, and Wool Towns.
2. Develop new brand-led marketing communications to drive effective and consistent messaging, growing its appeal as a destination to visit and stay, aligning with East of England planning, research and campaign delivery.
3. Position, empower and support the cultural, heritage & visitor economy to harness opportunities for investment, innovation and growth.
4. Develop programmes which manage overtourism, including educating visitors on how to treat the environment, and finding ways to disperse visitors by time and place, e.g. peak periods, congested 'honeypots'.
5. Find new uses for empty or underutilised (heritage) buildings, for meanwhile and more permanent uses.

6. Support all venues, but particularly heritage and listed sites to improve their environmental sustainability.
7. Support venues and organisations to improve their accessibility (physical, attitudinal, marketing and communications) for a range of audiences and visitors.
8. Explore new visitor markets, including but not limited to the Purple Pound, wellbeing markets (including leisure cycling and outdoor activity breaks).
9. Ensure clear (sector and public-targeted) information provision and data capture are effectively managed, including a structured annual research programme.
10. Harness digital as a transformative 'growth and innovation' tool for sector and individual business development.
11. Support diversification of the local visitor offer, especially accommodation infrastructure and proactively support new developments.
12. Research ways to encourage culinary innovation and entrepreneurship to boost the eating out / evening economy.
13. Provide quality improvement and business development advice regarding existing schemes and peer support.



SPOTLIGHT: GENERATING DIGITAL REACH - GENERATING IN NEW WAYS

It's not news to say that the Internet can reach (global) audiences in ways that traditional media cannot. Quirky and surprising viral stories can capture the imagination, but they can also be supported. People who could never visit The Gamble could become users, even fans. In 2019, nearly half a million people tuned in online to watch a live stream tour of the Village Museum in Ruddington, Nottinghamshire. Feixue Huangdu, a Chinese-national Masters degree student made the webcast and built a huge audience back home during her time studying in the UK.

www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-48758680

**AIM 3:
BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK'S CULTURE, HERITAGE AND
VISITOR SECTORS WILL WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH
NEIGHBOURING ORGANISATIONS, DISTRICTS AND COUNTIES
TO TRIAL NEW APPROACHES.**

OBJECTIVES

- 1. Develop a distinctive approach to sustainable tourism, inspired by the local food production heritage.
- 2. Develop an experience economy driven by culture and heritage which is visible in towns and communities.
- 3. Explore cross-sector and cross-boundary ways of working, especially innovative commissioning models, trails and thematic packages, e.g. food, visual arts heritage.
- 4. Develop and test brand offer, and market via travel trade / media trips through experience-based offer.
- 5. Utilise sub-regional infrastructure to the best effect for Babergh & Mid Suffolk's residents, businesses and visitors.
- 6. Work outside of comfort zones, employ a spirit of piloting and risk taking, with an understanding that models must be agile and evolving.

- 7. Commit to a faster rate of sector innovation which includes the commercial and subsidised sectors working collaboratively.
- 8. Support development of niche 'getaway' opportunities in the business tourism conference market.
- 9. Support the newly invested signature attractions as audience / visitor drivers and experience to fully develop potential as gateway experiences to the wider area, e.g. Shotley Peninsula, Sudbury etc.
- 10. Review and explore modelling for 'pilot & roll-out' initiatives, such as the wayfinding strategy in Stowmarket.
- 11. Identify and develop entrepreneurial opportunities and training partnerships to upskill the workforce and encourage the retention of hospitality students, notably working with the Further and Higher Education institutions.

Local partnerships and communities will become strong partners and leaders in increasing cultural participation – inspired by place, contributing to civic pride, environmental, educational, skills development and health & wellbeing goals. The sector will be supported with targeted and place-specific development programmes to better celebrate Babergh & Mid Suffolk's resident and visitor offer through its creative businesses, culture, heritage, and natural environment partners, telling our stories in a way that builds the local economy through strategic partnership.



CENTRE FOR CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The University of Suffolk continues to develop this Centre, building a cross-faculty team including arts & culture, creativity, history, law, architecture and English. In seeking to be the 'hub' for Creative Suffolk, CCH's aims include:

- Being a hub of creative excellence for research and creative projects;
- Connecting history and culture through events, exhibitions, research, education & outreach;
- Working with communities, individuals, and organisations in order to support the region's culture and heritage;
- Engaging with international partners.

www.uos.ac.uk/content/centre-culture-heritage

C. STRATEGY

Image: Pin Mill, Chelmondiston. Courtesy, Anthony Cullen



C1. A ROUTE MAP - CONVERGING COMMON PURPOSE ACROSS BABERGH & MID SUFFOLK

The cultural, heritage and visitor economy sectors will look to the Councils for strategic leadership (and guidance and advice for regional connectivity, funding and advocacy of course).

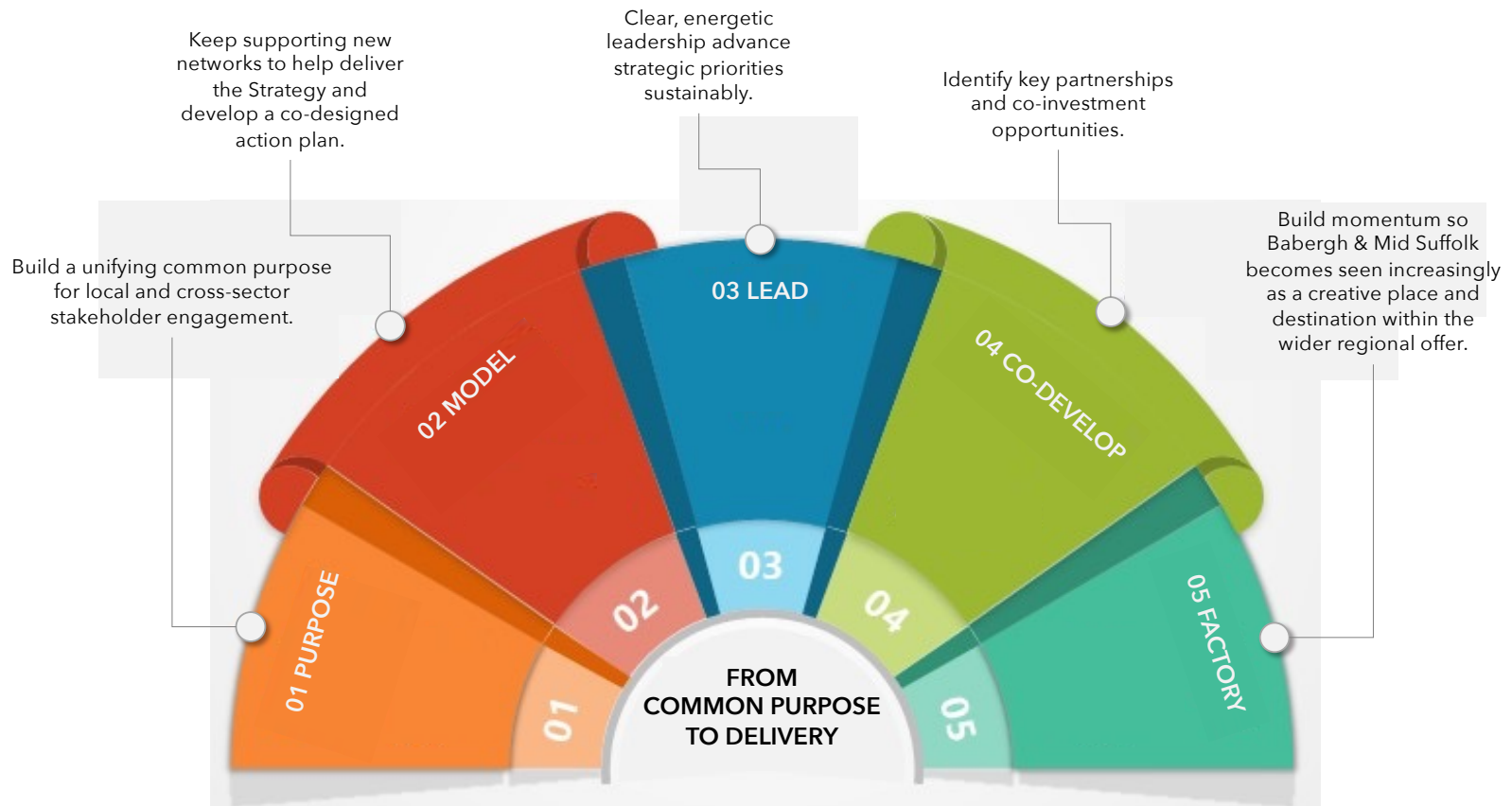
FROM COMMON PURPOSE TO DELIVERY

A strategic process to drive implementation of the Strategy.

In viewing the cultural, heritage, creative industries and tourism sectors as regenerators, social and economic value

creators, the Council can respond with tools, expertise and support to drive demonstrable impacts, including through nurturing cultural partnership and entrepreneurship.

The Council can be a fulcrum for cultural development, co-designing (across departments and with external partners) and deploying local and hyperlocal responses and programmes, as well as districts-wide.



C2. ACTION PLAN FRAMEWORK

C2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Action Plan covers an initial 2-year period, with annual reviews and updates through the duration of the period covered by the Strategy. It is designed as a live, transitional plan to guide actions and build capacity over this period. It should be seen and used as an iterative document, being updated on a regular basis (at least annually, but ideally much more often), as impacts, insights and opportunities present, through programme investment and evaluation.

The Action Plan is structured according to strategic priorities and their underlying objectives. Specifically, where possible, it:

- Sets realistic targets;
- Identifies the actions needed to achieve the target;
- Allocates responsibility to task leaders and supporters;
- Defines timescales;
- Identifies methods for evaluating the success rate and impact of each activity against the relevant target;
- Suggests indicative costs where possible.

While every attempt has been made to allocate responsibility, timescale, and resource requirements for each action, implementation of the Action Plan depends on a clear locus and structure for cultural development leadership being agreed / achieved.

C2.2 PROGRESSIVE FOCUS

The Year 1 focus in is to get up and running. Year 2 is more about implementing plans, building on Year 1 activities. As lessons are learnt, and new circumstances and opportunities emerge, proposed actions should be reviewed and refined.

C2.3 CO-PRODUCTION OF AN ACTION PLAN

The development of the action plan will be a fully collaborative process. As such this sample framework is very much a starting point only.

OBJECTIVES TO ACTIONS	Priority	Timescale	Lead / partners	Resource	Evaluation
Aim / Objective					
Action...					
Action...					

C3. CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This Strategy is all about making Babergh & Mid Suffolk a more attractive and dynamic place for residents and visitors alike. Babergh & Mid Suffolk aspires to be one of the UK's greenest, most welcoming, most liveable places, with residents and visitors inspired by its culture, heritage, food & drink, landscape and the diversity and quality of its accessible experiences and opportunities.

This Strategy sets out a visitor economy vision of a more integrated year-round offer; a unified presentation of the districts (and the distinctive places that make the whole) as a timeless yet contemporary destination.

This Strategy also sets out how more effective delivery partnerships can help Babergh & Mid Suffolk realise its ambitions to become more visible, connected and competitive as a place to be and a place to visit through its unique and rich culture and (natural and built) heritage. This can make a compelling case to build civic pride and participation, attract and retain visitors, continue to develop place-based and thematic partnerships and appeal to funders and investors.

In support of these aims this Strategy seeks to improve the quality, reach and effectiveness of Babergh & Mid Suffolk's cultural, heritage and visitor offer. Locals can discover and rediscover 'their' part of Suffolk, and visitors can find their own brand of ownership of a special place that is full of hidden and not-so-hidden gems.

The Strategy also seeks to be a vital foundation of wider economic development efforts for Babergh & Mid Suffolk, enabling the key partners to come together in more effective working structures that will allow them to compete successfully for the necessary supporting investment vital to future product, service and infrastructure development and promotion.

Babergh & Mid Suffolk's vision is to create a tourism offer that is:

- **Diverse** - The range and quality of opportunities and experiences accessible from Babergh & Mid Suffolk is second to none in the region.
- **Differentiated** - Babergh & Mid Suffolk is recognised and promoted as a vital cultural heritage hub for Suffolk and the region - a distinctive, welcoming, and captivating place.
- **Dynamic** - An enriched, joined up, cultural heritage-led tourism-friendly offer driving community and visitor growth, sustainable social and economic success.

What comes next is the important bit. It is all about continuing to build the local, district and regional partnerships that can help to deliver the ambitions of this Strategy for Babergh & Mid Suffolk's communities, visitors, businesses and partners. This start with an action plan, and a clear, collective response to both the exciting opportunities and challenges in meeting them with the energy, resources and capacity they deserve.



BENTON END

The philosophy of the art school was an informal, holistic education with a sense of the avant-garde and a radicalism which enabled creativity across disciplines spanning painting, literature botany, cookery, horticulture, environmentalism and more. Recently acquired by the Garden Museum, a project is underway to reopen the site to visitors, artists and creative practitioners, and the community, all in the spirit of the School's founders. Due to reopen in 2027, it will be an important addition to the wider artistic heritage offer as well as a resource for contemporary practice. More significantly, Benton End will be vital for the community through a full education, wellbeing, and environmental programme.



D. ADDENDUM

Image: John Peel Centre for Creative Arts, Stowmarket

D1. LIST OF CONSULTEES

Role	Organisation
Executive Director	Visit East of England
Innovation and Sectors Manager	New Anglia LEP
Co-Director	Suffolk Art Link
Chief Executive	MENTA
Arts Development Manager	Suffolk County Council
Pro Vice-Chancellor, Business and Entrepreneurship	University of Suffolk
Operations & Business Development Manager	Screen Suffolk
Head of Creative Programmes	DanceEast
Growing Places Fund Senior Coordinator	New Anglia LEP
Director	The Food Museum
Director	Gainsborough's House
Development Officer	Gainsborough's House
Events & Theatre Manager	The Regal Theatre and Cinema
Manager	Wingfield Barns
Development Officer	St. Peter's Church / Arts Venue
Project Founder, Painter	Pasture Place
Owner	Helmingham Hall & Gardens
Manager	Flatford Mill
Co-Owner	Suffolk Food Hall / Shotley Tourism Action Group
VE Strategic Lead, AONB Officer	Suffolk County Council
Strategic Lead for the Visitor Economy	Suffolk Growth Partnership
Brand Manager	Visit Suffolk
Chair	The Bank Arts Centre, Eye
Founder, CEO, Strategic Management Coordinator	Kinetic Science
Head of Engagement	Suffolk Wildlife Trust
	Stowmarket Stories

One-to-one consultations were conducted with representatives from a variety of culture, heritage, tourism creative and other sectors. The tables below set out who has responded to consulting approaches to date, from a larger database of over 150 contacts, which also served the workshops.

Role	Organisation
Administrative Officer	High Tide
Author	Easterly Artists, Suffolk Open Studios
Co-Director	Suffolk Artlink
Marketing and Digital Communications Officer	Eastern Angles
Director	Folk East
Secretary	Association for Suffolk Museums
CEO	Suffolk Libraries
Head of Primary Care Partnerships; Deputy Director of Partnerships and Alliance Delivery	East Suffolk CCG; Ipswich and East Suffolk Alliance
Chair	Mid Suffolk Disability Forum
Project Director	Benton End
Chair	Periscope LCEP
Organisations	
All About Ipswich	Frinfings
Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils	Gainsborough's House
Churches Conservation Trust	Hadleigh Town Council
De Vere House Accommodation	Haughley Park Ltd
Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	Heat Design
Dream On CIC & Blossom Charity	Hintlesham Hall Hotel
EA Festival	Jimmy's Farm & Wildlife Park
East Anglian Festival Network	John Peel Centre for Creative Arts
East Bergholt Parish Council	Little Hall Museum, Lavenham
Eye Heritage Group	MENTA
Eye Magazine	New Anglia LEP
Eye Town Council	Oakmere Solutions Ltd
Eyes Open Community Interest Company	Orchestras Live
Footprints Theatre Company	Rattlesden River Valley Network
Freelancers	Rectory Manor Hotel

A series of [stakeholder engagement workshops](#) were held. These workshops tested some early and emerging themes developed from the desk research and one-to-one consultations already undertaken, through use of stimulus questions and facilitated discussions. Attendees included community, cultural, heritage, tourism, hospitality, leisure and voluntary groups and organisations; businesses; creative practitioners; and Council officers, with representatives from the following organisations:

Organisations	
River Stour Festival	The Banks Arts Centre
SCC1	The Bridge Project
Screen Suffolk	The ERD Connection
Stow Stories	The Food Museum
Stowmarket Town Council	The Hotel Folk
Sudbury Common Lands Charity	The Kinetic Science Foundation
Sudbury Museum Trust	The Offshoot Foundation
Sudbury Town Council	The Old Rectory, Kettlebaston
Suffolk Artlink	The Pin Mill Studio
Suffolk Chamber of Commerce	The Quay Theatre
Suffolk County Council	Thomas Gainsborough School
Suffolk Growth Partnership	Visit Hadleigh
Suffolk Libraries	Wingfield Barns

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<p>VISITOR ECONOMY</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Volume and Value Report: Economic Impact of Tourism, Babergh Report, 2019, 2020, 2021 2. Volume and Value Report: Economic Impact of Tourism, Mid Suffolk Report, 2019, 2020, 2021 3. Destination Development Plans, Visit East of England & Partners, 2021 4. Visit East of England - Consumer Sentiment Survey, 2021 5. Visit East of England - B2B Survey Results 6. Volume and Value Report: Economic Impact of Tourism, Eye Report, 2018 7. Volume and Value Report: Economic Impact of Tourism, Hadleigh Report, 2018 8. Volume and Value Report: Economic Impact of Tourism, Lavenham Report, 2018 9. Volume and Value Report: Economic Impact of Tourism, Long Melford Report, 2018 10. Volume and Value Report: Economic Impact of Tourism, Needham Market Report, 2018 11. Volume and Value Report: Economic Impact of Tourism, Stowmarket Report, 2018 12. Volume and Value Report: Economic Impact of Tourism, Sudbury Report, 2018 13. Suffolk Visitor Economy Data Collection Brief, and Proposal, T-stats 2022 14. Economic Impact of Tourism, Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB, Destination Research, 2021 15. Economic Impact of Tourism, Stour Valley Project, Destination Research, 2021 16. Economic Impact of Tourism, Suffolk, Destination Research, 2021 17. Economic Impact of Tourism, Mid Suffolk, Destination Research, 2021 18. Economic Impact of Tourism, Babergh, Destination Research, 2021 19. Economic Impact of Tourism, Dedham Vale AONB, Destination Research, 2021 20. Naturally Creative Brief and Brand Creation, Visit East of England, 2022 21. South Suffolk, The BID for South Suffolk, Locus 22. AirBnB Suffolk Area Profile 23. Accessibility and Inclusion: Enabling growth of the Suffolk Visitor Economy, Suffolk Growth, 2023

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This is a representative rather than exhaustive list. A number of other articles, databases, academic and other studies and other reports will have been used in addition to this selection.

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 89</p> <p>CULTURE & HERITAGE</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heritage Engagement Ideas for the Suffolk Wool Towns, 2018 2. Head East, Lite Campaign Update, 2022 3. Head East, Campaign Evaluation, 2021 4. Driving Cultural Placemaking Overview, The Sudbury Culture Group 5. Feasibility Study on the Development of a Film Studio, Training Centre and Creative Cluster in Brantham, Olsberg SPI, 2022 6. John Peel Centre for Creative Arts, NPO Application, 2022 7. MEND at MEAL, Museum Estate and Development Fund Bid, Museum of East Anglian Life 8. NPO and IPSO Programme Bid, Museum of East Anglian Life, 2022 9. Project Summary Gainsborough's House 10. Culture Drives Growth, The East's Cultural Strategy, 2016-2022 11. Culture Drives Impact, The Norfolk and Suffolk Culture Board Manifesto, TFCC, 2022 12. Cultural Strategy, Evidence Report, New Anglia LEP, Hatch, 2021 13. Building the Cultural Economy Report, StartEast, BOP Consulting, 2021 14. Revenue Grant Application Form, Museum of East Anglian Life, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils, 2023-23 15. Revenue Grant Application Form, Eastern Angles, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils, 2023-23 16. Revenue Grant Application Form, DanceEast, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils, 2023-23 17. Revenue Grant Application Form, East Anglian Traditional Music Trust, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils, 2023-23 18. Revenue Grant Application Form, Eyes Open CIC, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils, 2023-23 19. Revenue Grant Application Form, Suffolk ArtLink, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils, 2023-23 20. Revenue Grant Application Form, John Peel Centre for Creative Arts, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils, 2023-23 21. Revenue Grant Application Form, The Quay Theatre, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils, 2023-23
<p>PLACE & COMMUNITIES, DEMOGRAPHICS & DATA</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What's Next for Sudbury - Key Projects under the Sudbury Vision Programme, 2022 2. What's Next for Sudbury - Questionnaire Initial Feedback, 2022 3. Delivering a Vision for Prosperity in Stowmarket: All-Issues Response 4. Delivering a Vision for Prosperity in Stowmarket: 5-Year Action Plan 5. Creating Wayfinding In Sudbury, The Public Art Company, 2021 6. Local Strategic Plans Framework (Plan on a Page), Sudbury Vision 7. Local Strategic Plans Framework (Plan on a Page), Stowmarket Vision 8. Vision (Plan on a Page), Invest in Hadleigh 9. Stowmarket Masterplan (SHELF), Stowmarket Vision 10. Community Development Grant Scoring Matrix, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils 11. Retail and Commercial Leisure Town Centre Study, Ipswich Borough & Suffolk Coastal District, 2017 12. Stowmarket Place Making and Creative Wayfinding Brief, Stowmarket Vision, 2022 13. Stowmarket Place Making and Creative Wayfinding Interim Report, Counterculture, 2022 14. Vision Engagement Activity Feedback, Invest in Needham Market 15. Programme and Scope, Invest in Eye Programme, Mid Suffolk District Council and Eye Town Council, 2021 16. Programme and Scope, Invest in Eye (Plan on a Page), Invest in Eye, 2021 17. C-CARE Reset and Redesign, Town Centre Recovery: new approaches, ITQ Feasibility/Pilot Project, Norfolk or Suffolk



ctconsults.

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INFORMATION BULLETIN

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Customer Services

This paper provides an overview of the different ways customers can engage with our services and some of the volumes and trends.

Across customer services we offer various ways for people to access high quality services and support, I have summarised these below and more detail is provided throughout the paper:

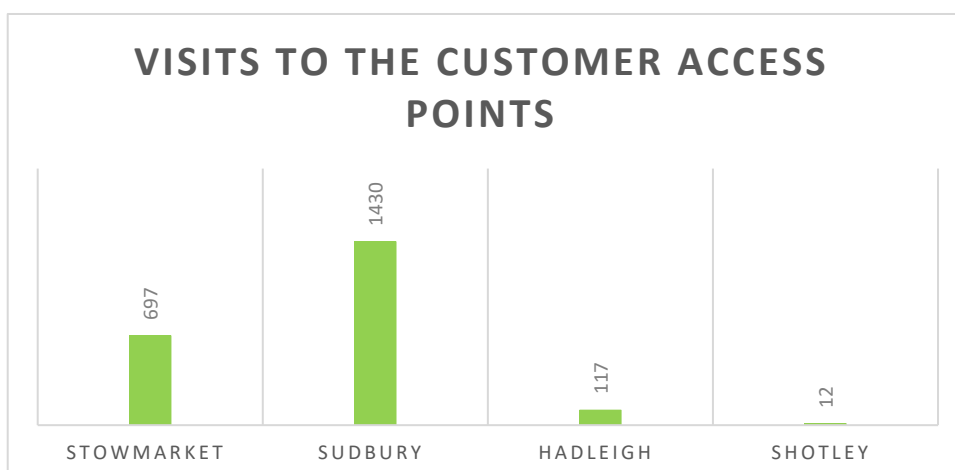
- Telephone support (including telephone appointments, call back options and out of hours emergency call centre support, for evening and weekend emergencies such as raising emergency repairs)
- Face to face support at our customer access points in Stowmarket, Sudbury, Hadleigh and Shotley.
- Social media responses
- Live chat (implemented in August 2023)
- Digital skills sessions (provided through our digital skills officer, as well as promoting the work of community organisations)
- Self-service and online support through our website, chatbot and automated telephone options. As well as online forms and e-mail interactions.

Face to face services:

We provide face to face services at our Customer Access Points, where we provide assisted self-service support for those residents who would prefer to speak to us in person or are digitally excluded.

From April 2023 to January 2024, we have supported 2,256 at our customer access points, the figures have been broken down by location below.

Fig 1. Visits to the customer access points.



Our data shows from the attendees to our customer access points:

- **71%** have attended before and the top reasons for attendance are to access support with scanning documents or completing forms, Council Tax and benefits enquiries, gateway to homechoice enquiries and general housing enquiries.
- The average time a customer spends with us is around **13 minutes**.
- **60%** of customers attend as they do not have access to a device, or they do not feel confident online.

In Mid Suffolk specifically we have seen a reduction in customers accessing support over the last few years and we are keen to explore how we may best work with our customers provide greater visibility, particularly in Mid Suffolk, as per the new Mid Suffolk plan. Over 2024, we will work with Councillors and customers to review options as to how we can achieve this objective.

Digital skills support:

To complement our in person offer and given many of our customers attending the customer access points do not have access to a device or do not feel confident, we also provide digital skills support services across Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

We commenced sessions in **3** sheltered schemes and deliver across Stowmarket, Stradbroke, Hadleigh, Sudbury, and Holbrook and **65** customers have accessed support this year.

We also support communities together East Anglia with their Communita workshops and commenced the Suffolk wide operational group to help map digital skills provision across Suffolk and work collectively to reduce duplication.

A customer provided the following feedback after receiving support at a one to one digital skills sessions:

“Thank you SO MUCH for all your help at yesterday afternoon’s ‘tutorial’ of my smartphone. I came away feeling positively optimistic, not a feeling I have experienced much since I bought it. Using the Samsung Health app you found was there for me already, I counted my steps back home, it told me how many calories I had burned during this, exertion and the distance. I played around with it late yesterday and this morning getting it to identify plants in my garden even though I knew what most of them were.”

We have also created a video to help demonstrate the impact of the digital skills services we provide, to help residents understand the support that is on offer. We have recently worked with our communications team to create information videos about digital skills sessions, to help promote these sessions.

Babergh’s digital skills video: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1074050890544831>

Mid Suffolk’s digital skills video: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/7208622939228477>

Telephone services:

We provide telephone services for customers and over April 2023 to January 2024, we have seen 109,132 calls into our service, alongside approx. 33,000 outbound calls to customers.

In the last year our customers experienced an average wait time of 2 minutes and 28 seconds. Whilst this is above our target levels of 1 minute and 45 seconds, it does mark a considerable improvement from 4 mins 36 seconds in the previous year. For context the average wait time is the average time a customer is waiting in a call queue (once they have selected an option) to the call being answered by an officer.

The challenges which contributed towards poorer performance for our average telephone wait times was a higher level of staff attrition on the last few years. Many of which left to undertake other roles within the Council.

Alongside this, we found that with a higher level of vacancies to fill, the recruitment process has taken longer. Also, as many of the staff have left to undertake secondment roles in the Council, in turn, we have advertised for temporary roles, which has impacted the level of interest in the vacancies.

To try and alleviate some of these concerns, we recruited three apprentices, to ensure there are enhanced opportunities for progression within the team. We are shortly commencing some process improvement work with our apprentices to review many of the services we provide to ensure we are removing any unnecessary duplication or pain points within the processes to help drive customer satisfaction.

We are aware that call wait times are a priority for our residents and we are working to reduce those now we have nearly recruited a full complement of staff, with the final few positions starting over the next month. So far, this year, our average wait time in January was 1 minute 50 seconds and February was 1 minute and 23 seconds. We are keen to continuously improve our wait times and will be monitoring and reporting our performance to ensure there is appropriate oversight and ensure we are meeting the objectives of our new Mid Suffolk and Babergh plans.

We operate an automated telephone satisfaction survey, of the customers who completed this at the end of the call 70% of customers said they were either very satisfied or satisfied with our services.

Some of the compliments left for the service were as follows:

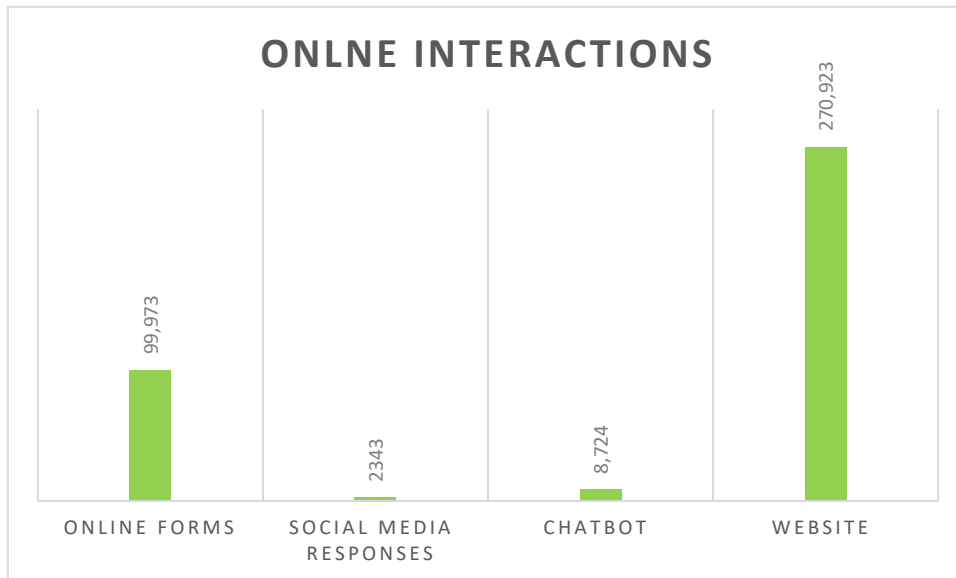
- *Thank you for all the hard work and dedication you put in daily, me and my son appreciate the lengths you go too.*
- *Pass on our thanks for his help on making a very difficult time easier he has been brilliant!*
- *Just wanted to thank customer services, for wonderful help. Absolutely marvellous lady. Sorted my problem out.*

Lastly, we do have automated telephone services and in September a new automated missed collection line was created to support residents who did not want to speak to an officer and allows customers to report issues at a convenient time for them. Over the last year **3,019** interactions have been registered on the automated telephone service line, with the majority related to waste and environmental services.

Online services

There are different online and automated options available for residents who would prefer to interact us with digitally. The ways in which residents can interact with us online include through the new Councils websites, online forms, chatbot, live chat and social media. From April 2023 to January 2024, we have seen the following online interactions.

Fig 2: online customer interactions between April 2023 to January 2024



Over 2024 we will be transitioning our online forms to our new digital platform, and we will be working collaboratively with services and customers to review and redesign our forms to ensure they are intuitive and easy to use.

New services delivered in the last year:

Since August 2023 we have implemented **live chat** services on our website, as a complementary offer alongside our chatbot functions. Since implementing live chat **858** customers have used this service.

In August 2023 we also introduced a call back option on our general services line, so if customers didn't want to wait in a queue, they were able to select this service and we call them back. Since launching this service 327 customer have selected this option and we will be rolling this service out across Council Tax, benefits, and housing rents and our housing line over the next 6 months.

Lastly, in October 2023, we implemented our new Council websites. When creating the sites, we worked with over 50 officers across the Councils to review and refresh the current content to improve the information presented and make it clearer for residents. We continue to make iterative changes, based on customer feedback, with one customer noting:

"I think that is a lot neater and simpler and still very accessible. What a pleasure it is to engage with someone that is responsive to ideas. I don't expect you to adopt all that I say, but to explain what you are doing and even make some changes... well that's so refreshing these days. Well done."

Before the launch of our new sites, we also worked with ACE Anglia an advocacy organisation working with people with learning disabilities and autistic people across Suffolk. With the support of ACE, we undertook a testing workshop to gain feedback and make further changes ahead of the launch.

Whilst many changes have taken place, we appreciate that the website will always require iterative change and improvement to ensure that our customers expectations are met. We will shortly be commencing work to review the PDF's that are located on our website (PDF's are usually policies and guidance for example) to ensure these are accessible for our residents. We are also exploring different ways to present the information, including the use of easy read documents to ensure that are website is inclusive for residents and we would be keen to share progress on this as we continue develop our plans over this year.

Fig 3: Session at ACE Anglia to test the websites.



Complaints

Between the 1st of April 2023 and the 31st of December 2023, the Councils received 770 stage one complaints. This represents a 30% increase when compared 2022. Our largest volume of complaints received during this time are as follows:

- Building Services: 314 an increase of 88 (38.9%) from 226 between the same period in 22.
- Asset Compliance: 136 an increase of 55 (67.9%) from 81.
- Tenancy Services: 48 an increase of 22 (84.6%) from 26.
- Waste Services: 42 an increase of 10 (31.3%) from 32.
- Housing Solutions: 37 an increase of 5 from 32 (15%)

Stage 2 complaints have also increased to 117 (from 76 in 2022), this is largely due to the increase in stage 1 complaints received. The breakdown of stage 2 complaints shows that 75% relate to housing, 9% planning enforcement, 6% planning and 6% public realm.

Often our complaints are related to delays in undertaking repairs work, insufficient communication of next steps as well as multiple visits required to remedy an issue. In the last year, several changes have taken place such as changes in contractors, a new damp and mould contractor appointed to ensure that inspection work can be carried out more quickly and in late 2023 housing appointed a resolutions coordinator, to help review initial complaints and resolve them more quickly for tenants.

Stage two complaints are often escalated when the tenant is unhappy that works or repairs have not been completed or scheduled following their stage one complaint. It is hoped that the new housing resolutions coordinator role will help have a positive impact on the number of stage two complaints received.

In February and March 2024 all officers who handle complaints are undertaking refresher training with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to help continuously improve the quality of responses we provide to customers. Alongside this, we are also implementing a new complaints system over the early part of this year, which is being developed as part of our digital platform project which will provide a more seamless digital experience for our customers and allow for reporting at District level for complaints.

Compliments

Between the 1st of April and 31st December, the Councils received 152 compliments.

The three most common areas for compliments were:

- Building Services
- Planning and Planning Enforcement
- Customer Services

A sample of compliments can be viewed below:

“I would like to leave a compliment for the plumber who came to fix the leak in the bathroom, he was absolutely brilliant and want him again if there are anymore leaks”.

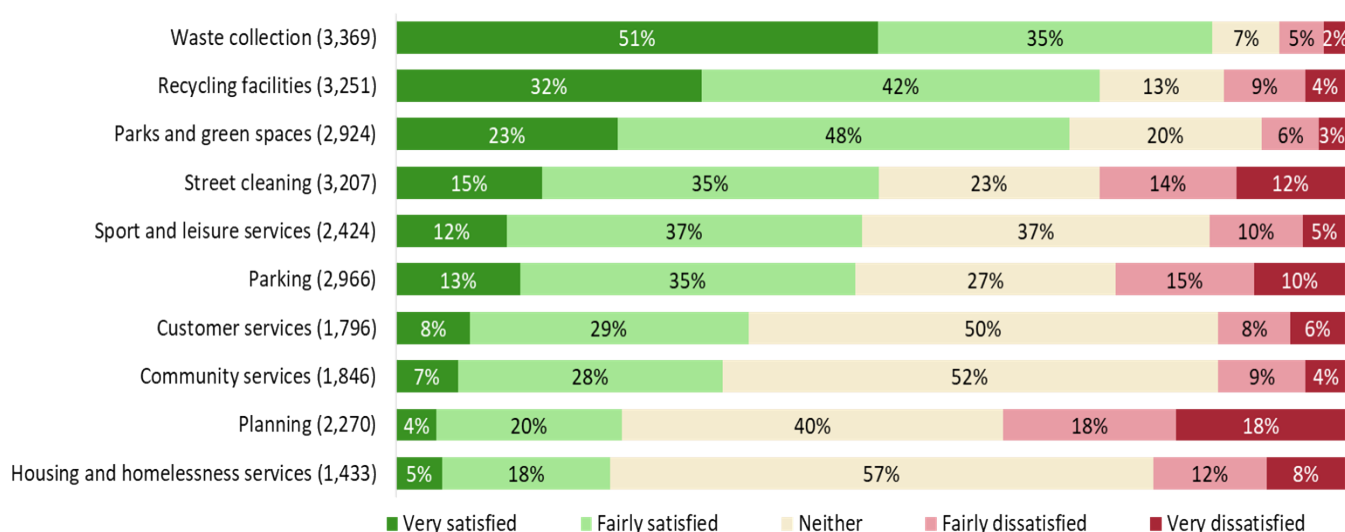
“I just want to take the time to thank you for all your amazing help in getting my debts sorted, my housing situation and constant communication with me. Without you I know I'd be homeless, and my disability would get a lot worse.”

“I just wanted to say a big thank you for getting the decision over the line last week and for your helpful advice during the application process. I also thought your committee presentation was excellent and provided clear and informative guidance through the key issues relevant to the planning assessment. We now look forward to discharging relevant conditions and commencing with the development of a high-quality housing scheme.”

We strive to use customer insight and feedback to improve our services and over the next year we will be looking to undertake both an internal and external customer satisfaction survey with the institute of customer services, to benchmark our satisfaction across other Councils and organisations.

The internal customer survey will measure our customer culture across the organisation to ensure we are embedding an ethos that customer services is the role of everyone across the Council and our external survey will provide us with the opportunity to explore the key drivers of customer satisfaction. We will use the results to understand more about how we can drive actionable insights from the residents survey results. For context, I have added some of the areas of focus we are particularly keen to improve, below.

Fig 4: Residents survey satisfaction with services:



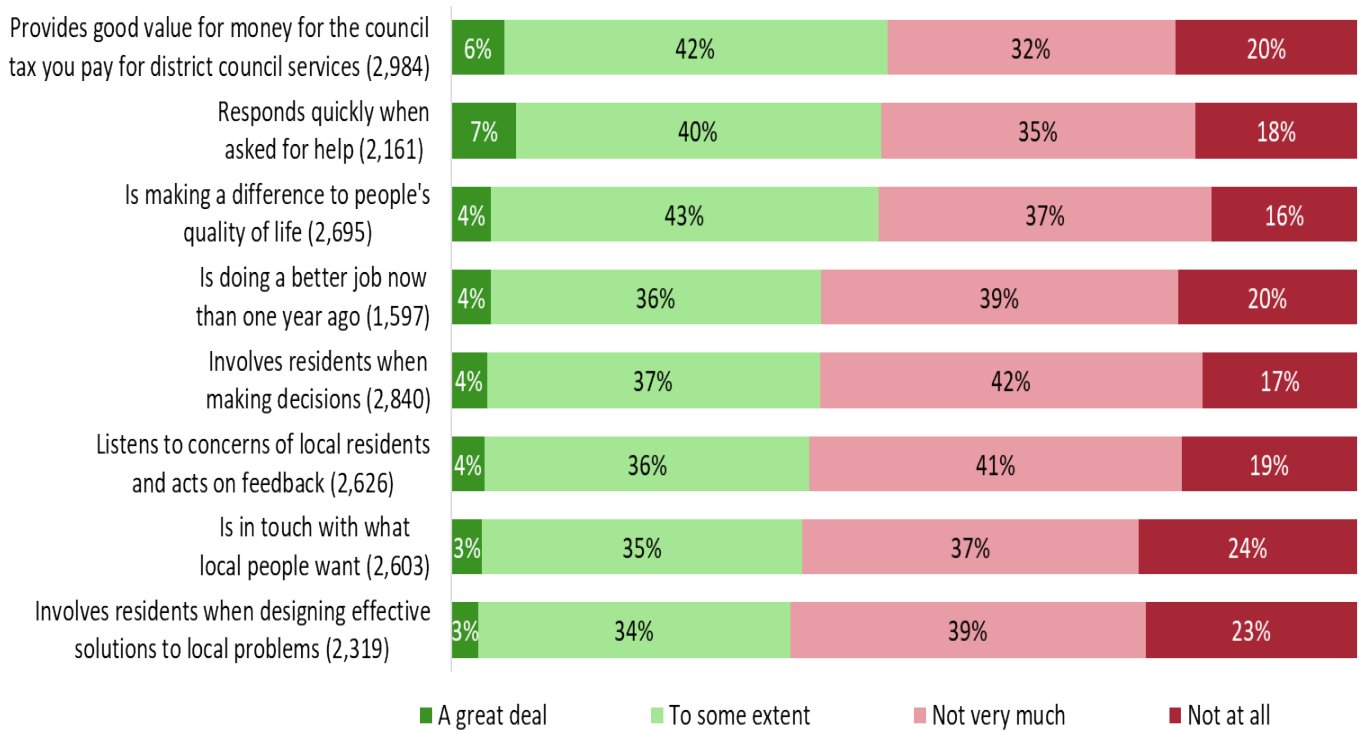
The above shows that only 37% of residents surveyed were satisfied with customer services. This shows a 2% decrease from the previous year. We can also see that 6% are very dissatisfied with

the services we provide. It is important to be able to respond and act on this, we undertake more granular analysis to help us to improve.

Throughout this process we are keen to explore how to involve customers within this action plan, as we understand that many people do not feel the Council involve residents in decision making. This was another key area for improvement from the residents survey. Therefore, once we have understood the areas of concern more closely, we will look to ensure we involve residents in our improvement plans to ensure we are delivering services that meet their needs.

Lastly, we will seek to understand how we can support residents to feel more satisfied that we respond quickly when they ask for help. We propose to bring back our findings from the survey and insight work to a future overview and scrutiny, to help develop and scrutinise our plans.

Fig 5: Resident survey findings regarding the view of their local Council.



Overall, we hope this report demonstrated the changes that have been made over the last year and provides some insight into our proposed areas for improvement, considering the new plans agreed at Full Council in January and taking account of the resident survey findings.

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JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER

Updated 23rd February 2024 - AN

The purpose of this action tracker is to document and track the progress of all recommendations made by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This tracker seeks to inform committee members on the implementation of their recommendations and the subsequent decisions reached by Cabinet if required. This tracker is updated ahead of and following each meeting of the Committee.

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
22.01.24	BOS/23/05	General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 2024/25	1.1 That the draft revenue budgets set out in the report for the 2024/25 GF and HRA budgets be noted.	N/A		Completed
			1.2 That engagement with the public, specifically through media releases and Town & Parish Liaison meetings, be encouraged to help outline and provide clarity to the public regarding the budget pressures on the Council.	MeE/BJ	22/02: The next T&PL meeting are currently being scheduled for March/April	Ongoing
			1.3 That the Council actively considers the deployment of certain services to Town and Parish Councils who have an appetite to accept functions currently carried out by the District.	AC		Not Started

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
22.01.24	MOS/23/05	General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 2024/25	1.1 That the draft revenue budgets set out in the report for the 2024/25 GF and HRA budgets be noted and that the new approach to budget setting is welcomed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.	N/A		Completed
			1.2 That further information on interest receivable and capital expenditure be included in future Overview and Scrutiny reports to provide a breakdown of interest for all projects and debts.	MeE		Included in future report
			1.3 That tables detailing the breakdown of information on aspects such as the increase in dwelling rents and service charging be included in future Overview and Scrutiny reports.	MeE		Included in future report
			1.4 That the lobbying of central government on the 1 year funding settlement being increased be continued.	MeE		Completed
			1.5 That officers explore incorporating accessibility improvements into the reports, including bridge charting, graphics, and a glossary, to provide Members with further clarity on the information provided.	MeE		Included in future report

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
20.11.23	MOS/23/01	Draft General Fund (GF) 2024/25 Assumptions	1.1 That the draft budget assumptions as set out in the report for the 2024/25 General Fund budget be noted.	N/A		Completed

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
20.11.23	BOS/23/01	Draft General Fund (GF) 2024/25 Assumptions	1.1 That the draft budget assumptions as set out in the report for the 2024/25 General Fund budget be noted.	N/A		Completed
			1.2 That the Director for Corporate Resources further assesses how the Council manages its income to further decrease the general fund deficit.	MeE		Completed

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
20.11.23	JOS/23/27	Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024	1.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commends the housing department for the work they are conducting to help reduce homelessness in the Districts and requests that officers taken on board the comments made at the meeting.	N/A		Completed
			1.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the vision and priorities of the draft Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy and ensures that the Delivery Plan is reflective of the current challenges facing the Districts.	N/A		Completed
			1.3 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee strongly supports the work being undertaken to meet the domestic abuse housing alliance accreditation.	N/A		Completed
			1.4 That Cabinet makes further plans to provide financial support for the services provided under the homelessness reduction and rough sleeping strategy beyond the end of the Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding in 2025.	DF/AAY	Will be discussed at the next O&S Strategy meeting between the Chairs and the Leaders	Ongoing
			1.5 That Cabinet explores further means of providing assistance to those under 25 with becoming adequately housed in order to avoid an influx of young people becoming homeless.	DF/AAY	Will be discussed at the next O&S Strategy meeting between the Chairs and the Leaders	Ongoing
			1.6 That Cabinet explores providing more resources to the housing department to assist with communicating about the services available from the Councils and Central Suffolk Lettings to those who are, or are at risk of becoming, homeless.	DF/AAY	Will be discussed at the next O&S Strategy meeting between the Chairs and the Leaders	Ongoing

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
23.10.23	JOS/23/21	Annual Review of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy	1.1 That Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the strategic aims of the Homes and Housing Strategy ensuring the delivery plan is reflective of the current challenges facing the housing sector, whilst continuing to deliver the aims set out in the Homes and Housing Strategy.	N/A		Completed
			1.2 That officers explore ways of reducing the proposed 4-year timescale for completing a full stock condition audit of the Councils' properties.	DF/AAY	Methods have been explored and now the aim is to have a complete 100% audit of stock condition surveys within the calendar year (2024).	Completed
			1.3 That Cabinet reconsiders the use of inhouse occupational therapists.	N/A	Will be discussed at the next O&S Strategy meeting between the Chairs and the Leaders	Ongoing

23.10.23	JOS/23/21	Annual Review of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy	1.4 That Cabinet identify what housing is affordable in the private market to various demographics in the Districts to determine the most appropriate tenures to secure and deliver.	N/A	Will be discussed at the next O&S Strategy meeting between the Chairs and the Leaders	Ongoing
			1.5 That officers incorporate a RAG status into future reports taken before Joint Overview and Scrutiny to provide more detailed focus on the associated risks of the delivery of the Strategy.	DF/AAY	Will be presented within the annual report that is scheduled to come to Overview and Scrutiny in October 2024.	Included in future report
			1.6 That the Cabinet undertake a clear refocus on housing and ensure that there is enough support for officers to achieve the housing needs of our residents.	N/A	Will be discussed at the next O&S Strategy meeting between the Chairs and the Leaders	Ongoing
			1.7 That officers are requested to involve all Members in any open sessions carried out by the Housing department.	DF		Completed
			1.8 That the Chief Planning Officer provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the number of dwellings with outstanding planning permission that have not yet begun construction.	PI/TB		Ongoing
			1.9 That officers identify residents who are most vulnerable so that services can be proactively designed around their needs and tailored to them when appropriate.	DF	Officers are now gathering information on resident vulnerabilities through customer satisfaction surveys which will form a data base, allowing officers to offer a more tailored service and support network.	Completed
			1.10 That Cabinet and officers explore methods of both providing communicating to residents the option to downsize their properties.	N/A	Will be discussed at the next O&S Strategy meeting between the Chairs and the Leaders	Ongoing
			1.11 That officers scrutinise and investigate private landlords before working collaboratively with them.	DF	26/01: Update requested from Officers. Awaiting response.	Ongoing
		1.12 That Cabinet reconsiders the means in which data is collected in support of community-led housing.	N/A	Will be discussed at the next O&S Strategy meeting between the Chairs and the Leaders	Ongoing	

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
18.09.23	JOS/23/15	Review on Current Levels of Untreated Sewage Discharges to Waters in Babergh and Mid Suffolk	1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanks Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, Natural England, and the River Stour Trust for their attendance and for the answers provided.	N/A		Completed
			1.2 That the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny provide a report and verbal update on the contents and outcomes of the Committee meeting at the next Full Council meetings.	AN	Presented to Council on 24th/26th October.	Completed
			1.3 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for more information from the external representatives, specifically including the phosphate reducing programme, and asks that this be fed back to the Committee via an information bulletin.	AN		Completed
			1.4 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for a wider publicity campaign for residents, staff, and Councillors regarding materials that cannot be put into the sewage system.	BJ		Ongoing
			1.5 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for Cabinet to investigate the possibility of running a campaign regarding the provision of water butts for residents.	MaE	Will be discussed at the next O&S Strategy meeting between the Chairs and the Leaders	Ongoing

			1.6 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests for Council to consider supporting "citizen science" projects	N/A	Presented to Council on 24th/26th October.	Completed
			1.7 That Mid Suffolk District Council receives an update on their concerns over water quality in the District from OFWAT.	AN		Ongoing

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
21.08.23	JOS/23/08	CIFCO Performance Report (2022/23) and Business Plan (2023/24)	1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the CIFCO Business Trading and Performance Report and asks that the minutes of the meeting be taken into account when CIFCO is next considered at Full Council.	EA	Presented to Council on 18th September.	Completed
	JOS/23/09	Cost of Living: Review of 6 Month Plan and Beyond	1.1 To note phase 3 of the Cost of Living Action Plan and endorse the commitment to develop a longer term approach to preventing poverty, which seeks to understand the underlying drivers of poverty across both districts at a hyper-local level, through continued work with internal and external stakeholders and to include wider engagement with Town and Parish Councils.	SW/SL		Completed

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
24.07.23	JOS/23/02	Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership	1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the report and commends the Officers involved for their work within the Partnership.	N/A		Completed
			1.2 That an All Member Briefing and further training be delivered for all Councillors regarding the topics covered by the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership, including how to report ASB and an updated contact list.	KO/VM	26/01: Update requested from Officers. Awaiting response.	Ongoing
			1.3 That a review of the current costs of Babergh and Mid Suffolk resources and the potential impact of further statutory responsibilities is undertaken and reported back to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.	KO/VM		Included in future report
			1.4 That the level of engagement with community groups within the Districts is incorporated into the next review of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership and is reported to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.	KO/VM		Included in future report
			1.5 That a review is undertaken of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership's position within the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Significant Business Risk Register.	KO/VM	26/01: Update requested from Officers. Awaiting response.	Ongoing
			1.6 That more formal communication procedures are put in place between the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership and our Parish / Town Councils.	KO/VM	26/01: Update requested from Officers. Awaiting response.	Ongoing

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
20.02.23	JOS/22/45	Are Planning Pre-Application Advice Customers Getting a Valuable Service?	3.1 That the contents of the report be noted by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee	N/A		Completed
			3.2 That Officers be requested to alter the frequency and content of the survey of customer experience of the pre-application service to "open" rather than annual	TB/PI		Completed
			3.3 That Officers be requested to undertake an annual survey of Development Management Planning Officers of their experience of customer service.	TB/PI	Lack of feedback provided so far in annual surveys so this recommendation will not be carried forward.	Rejected
			3.4 That Officers develop a model for quarterly audit of timeliness, quality and customer service including to assess the effectiveness of the pre-application advice process in the validation of applications and correlation of advice with outcome	TB/PI	This is in place with a yearly audit also taking place in October. Officers are encouraged to undertake a personal audit of their work every Friday.	Completed
			3.5 That the Corporate Director for Planning and Building Control and the Chief Planning Officer review the results of the above-mentioned surveys and audit with the Client Side Panel and report at least bi-annually to the Cabinet Members for Planning	TB/PI		Completed
			3.6 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee request the Director for Planning and Building Control and the Chief Planning Officer consider arrangements to provide adequate training and mentoring opportunities for all planning staff with a view to providing an improved level of pre-app service	TB/PI	Training has taken place for planning officers particularly on providing a consistent & effective service and strengthening customer satisfaction. Principal planning officers have also been mentoring and training junior members of staff in-house.	Completed
			3.7 That the Corporate Director for Planning and Building Control and the Chief Planning Officer aim for an overall quality of advice level of satisfaction of 60% by 30th April 2025	TB/PI	26/01: Currently still planning for this level of satisfaction.	Ongoing

Date	Item Ref	Item Title	Recommendations	Key Officer	Progress	Status
30.09.22	JOS/22/8	Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' Parking Strategy	1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the content of the report and that a verbal presentation of the comments made at this meeting be provided to Cabinet	N/A	Presented to Cabinet on 3rd October.	Completed
			1.2 That Cabinet is requested to carry out further work to reduce carparking demands with alternatives by looking at other areas that have done so successfully.	MaE	12.10.23 The Council has several ongoing sustainable transport projects including Active Travel Infrastructure, improving public transport routes and car sharing initiatives, which could all reduce car park demand. Parking Manager and Sustainable Transport Officer continuing to work together to identify any other initiatives.	Completed
			1.3 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee asks that a report be provided to the Committee in due course to review the progress on the Parking strategy implementation plan.	MaE	12.10.23 EV Chargers have been installed in 6 car parks. Preparation for a review of residents parking has commenced in Stowmarket, ahead of confirming funding for a project post. Parking pages of the Council's website have been corrected and updated. Digital Season Tickets have been launched. Replacement Tariff Board project has started and progressing well.	Completed

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Agenda Item 13

BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2023/24:

TOPIC	PURPOSE	LEAD OFFICER	CABINET MEMBER
14 MARCH 2024			
Review of the Implementation of the Culture, Heritage, and Visitor Economy Strategy	To review the progress of the Strategy's implementation plan – requested to come to this Committee by Members in January 2023.	Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change	Cabinet Member for Economic Growth
Information Bulletin: A Review into the Use of Customer Focussed Services	To review how residents are engaging with different service areas relating specifically to the Customers department.	Director – Customers, Digital Transformation, and Improvement	Cabinet Member for Customers, Digital Transformation, and Improvement
18 MARCH 2024			
BDC Only: Car Parking Charges and Road Traffic Orders	To examine and advise Cabinet on the proposal for varying car parking charges and road traffic orders	Director - Operations	Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments
22 APRIL 2024			
An Overview of the Handling Processes for Enforcement Caseload	To review the work undertaken by the Planning Enforcement team and the processes / structures followed when determining caseload	Director – Planning and Building Control	Cabinet Member for Planning
Housing Assistance Policy under the Regulatory Reform Order	To review the proposal to increase the grant amounts within the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)	Director - Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing
20 MAY 2024			
Is the Councils' social housing stock "inspection ready"?	Review of existing caseload and resources needed for repairs to meet new and improved standards	Director - Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing
CIFCO Performance Report (2023/24) and Business Plan (2024/25)	To conduct the Committee's annual review of the CIFCO service before reporting to Full Council.	Director – Assets and Investments	Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets, and Investments

Topics still to be timetabled:

- **Town Regeneration** – Identifying issues regarding our town centres and how we can increase footfall / use of services in key areas through extra support **(Moved to July 2024)**
- **Staff Productivity** – To review the main locations where staff are working and the level of productivity of officers **(Awaiting Chief Executive All Member Briefing)**

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Agenda Item 14

MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2023/24:

TOPIC	PURPOSE	LEAD OFFICER	CABINET MEMBER
14 MARCH 2024			
Review of the Implementation of the Culture, Heritage, and Visitor Economy Strategy	To review the progress of the Strategy's implementation plan – requested to come to this Committee by Members in January 2023.	Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change	Cabinet Member for Thriving Towns and Rural Communities
Information Bulletin: A Review into the Use of Customer Focussed Services by Residents	To review how residents are engaging with and rating different service areas relating specifically to the Customers team.	Director – Customers, Digital Transformation, and Improvement	Cabinet Member for Customers, Digital Transformation, and Improvement
22 APRIL 2024			
An Overview of the Handling Processes for Enforcement Caseload	To review the work undertaken by the Planning Enforcement team and the processes / structures followed when determining caseload	Director – Planning and Building Control	Cabinet Member for Heritage, Planning, and Infrastructure
Housing Assistance Policy under the Regulatory Reform Order	To review the proposal to increase the grant amounts within the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)	Director - Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing
20 MAY 2024			
Is the Councils' social housing "inspection ready"?	Review of existing caseload and resources needed for repairs to meet new and improved standards	Director - Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing
CIFCO Performance Report (2023/24) and Business Plan (2024/25)	To conduct the Committee's annual review of the CIFCO service before reporting to Full Council.	Director – Assets and Investments	Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Topics still to be timetabled:

- **Town Regeneration** – Identifying issues regarding our town centres and how we can increase footfall / use of services in key areas through extra support **(Moved to July 2024)**
- **Staff Productivity** – To review the main locations where staff are working and the level of productivity of officers **(Awaiting Chief Executive All Member Briefing)**

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