

- **Planning officers for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are in the running for a national award... having paved the way for technological advances as part of 21st century planning.**

The Development Management team, which looks after planning matters for both councils, is shortlisted in the Best Use of Digital and Technology category at the annual iESE – Public Sector Transformation Awards 2020.

The category recognises the innovative use of digital tools and technology in order to improve services for residents.

Judges were impressed by how the team had streamlined the planning application process for residents across the districts, bringing teams and systems together in order to become one of the top performing authorities for timely planning decisions. The team has also introduced electronic case management and a mobile app in order to put vital information at the fingertips of officers and the public – with public searches of information leaping from 600K in 2017 to 1.3m in 2018. And, although not yet in use, they have started to pave the way for future technological advances, such as the possible use of drones and augmented reality as part of the 21st century planning process.

- **Babergh District Council tonight approved its budget for 2020/21, including an increase in council tax that will see £5 a year added to the bill of a Band D property.**

Headlines include:

- A proposed increase of 3.1% to council tax – equivalent to just 10p a week or £5 over the course of a year for a Band D property (increases range from 6p per week for the smallest Band A property to 19p per week for the largest Band H property).
- No change in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme that sees poorest residents pay just 5% of their bill.
- A change to empty property discount, reducing the period that unoccupied and unfurnished properties pay discounted council tax from three months to 28 days, in order to bring empty properties in the district back into use.
- Continued investment in CIFCO – the council's property investment company, as agreed in last year's budget. CIFCO makes a significant contribution to the money required to run the councils' services, without

which residents would face either a substantial hike in council tax bills to fund the shortfall, or cuts to services.

- An increase in long-stay car parking charges from £2 to £3. However, short-stay parking for up to three hours will remain free at all of our town centre car parks.

After four years of reductions, the council is also proposing putting up council house rents by 2.7% meaning a £2.38 per week increase for tenants – although, even with this increase, rents are still lower than in 2015/6. Sheltered housing tenants also face an increase of £2 a week on their bills, but their utility payments remain static for another year.

- **A number of shops in Suffolk are offering refills for a host of household items in a bid to cut down on the amount of plastic and packaging we use.**

The Suffolk Waste Partnership has launched a handy online directory which lists the shops, businesses or charities that host refill points for items such as cleaning products, toiletries and dried foods, such as rice or oats and even loose-leaf tea and chocolate. At the moment there are 22 organisations which stock refills, but the partnership is encouraging other businesses to consider introducing similar schemes.

- **Now Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils' cabinets are set to discuss proposals to ensure the councils are poised to provide a discretionary retail discount, local newspaper discount and pub discount to support ratepayers across the districts as quickly as possible.**

The Government pledged to:

- increase the retail discount from one third to 50% and include cinemas and music venues within the scheme
- extend the duration of the existing newspapers discount
- and introduce an additional discount for pubs

The Church Road application had many things counting against it as outlined in the officers report:

- Bentley have already built or are planning to build their target number;
- The mix of houses wasn't what is needed – more 1 and 2 bedroom houses;
- Not enough bungalows;
- There was some spurious arrangement for affordable housing on another site – without planning permission;
- The lane suffers from flooding and is too narrow for a large increase in traffic – especially during school drop-off and pick-up time. The parish are hoping to make this a 'Quiet Lane';
- It was to be built in an extension of the AONB and would adversely affect the views;
- Village services are very limited and this application was largely outside the village boundary.

So, in summary there was very little to support reversing the officer's decision.