

**News and information from Jane Gould, Babergh District Councillor,
to the Parish Councils and residents in Orwell Ward
March 2023**

Help us promote our digital skills sessions

Do you know residents in your community and local network who'd like some help using the internet or a device like an iPad, smartphone or laptop? They can book a session with our digital skills team. Bookable sessions are now scheduled for March at libraries in Needham Market, Stowmarket, Sudbury and Hadleigh, with full details available on our website. All you need to do is call on 0300 1234000 to book.

Introducing the People & Place Plan pilot scheme

Babergh and Mid Suffolk are among only six authorities across the country to be part of a Government-funded pilot, aiming to get more communities shaping the places they live with a new approach to planning. Through the pilot we are helping community groups develop People and Place Plans, which are simpler and more accessible ways for our residents to highlight their local planning priorities. These Plans are being proposed as lighter alternatives to developing full Neighbourhood Plans. The team behind the pilot will work with communities to help identify what buildings, areas and characteristics are important to them, and will deliver bespoke workshops and toolkits to help assemble the plans.

If you have any questions, would like to get involved, or know a group that would be interested, please call or email community engagement planning officer, Jo Wood, details are on the website.

Suffolk's first Youth Climate Conference

Save the date - Wednesday 5 July 2023 is the scheduled date for Suffolk's first Youth Climate Conference. The event is being organised by the team behind Creating The Greenest County, in partnership with the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, which includes our councils, and Suffolk County Council.

The intention is to bring together students from secondary schools across the county for a morning of discussions, workshops, networking and mutual-learning about all things climate change and tackling the climate emergency in Suffolk. A venue, timings and full programme will be announced in due course, but, in the meantime, you can find more information on the Green Suffolk website. Or contact Abigail Blake if you have any questions or would like to be directly contacted with further updates over the coming months.

Free mental health first aid training

Do you know volunteer, charity, faith or social enterprise groups that need a Mental Health First Aider? Two accredited MHFA training courses are currently available free of charge to voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) groups in Babergh and Mid Suffolk. This training is for those in roles such as line managers, team leaders and volunteer coordinators who want to better support the wellbeing of their staff, colleagues and volunteers. Courses are four half-day sessions:

- March intake: 15, 16, 22 & 23 March, 1pm-5pm
- April intake: 18 & 25 April, 2 & 9 May, 1pm-5pm

Contact Bethany Taylor (01449 724881) if you have any further questions.

A reminder of local election advice and guidelines

As you know, the local and parish elections will be held on Thursday 4 May. We have now mailed 90,000 Household Notification letters to all households in the districts on 16 February, which also included information on the new Voter ID requirement. A leaflet will be issued with this year's Council Tax billing letter, which will go out this month (March). This will also include information on what people should do if they do not have an accepted form of identification. Residents without any of the accepted forms of photo ID can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate, up to 25 April. It is also important that we encourage our residents to check that they are on the electoral register, and if not to register to vote by 17 April.

Following the issue of the Household Notification letters we have received:

- average of 250 new voter registrations per day
- approximately 70 postal vote applications per day
- 60 online and 3 paper Voter Authority Certificate applications

Guidelines and restrictions during pre-election period

Pre-election period starts on March 23, March 16 for parish councils, triggering a number of restrictions. The main restriction is on proactive publicity by the council relating to candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. The council can still issue media releases on factual matters provided that these do not identify individual councillors or groups of councillors. Councillors are still free to respond to enquiries received from the media in a personal capacity. Individual councillors can issue their own statements, write letters to the local newspapers for publication, contact the media directly or say what they like in a personal capacity, but must not use council resources to do so.

It is still possible for the council to issue statements on behalf of a councillor holding a key political or civic position provided it relates to important events which are outside the council's control and can be shown to justify a member response. These occasions are likely to be rare and to be the exception, rather than the rule. If you have any specific concerns or queries, please contact the monitoring officer.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any issues that you think I can help with and all the very best to you all.

Jane Gould

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