

News and information from Jane Gould, Babergh District Councillor.

To the residents in Orwell Ward

20 April 2020

We are now entering the next three week period of isolation and I hope that you are all coping and have adjusted, as far as is possible, to our new lifestyle.

Chinese Lanterns

I would like to share with you all an email I received from one of our villagers which is a warning about the dangers of launching Chinese lanterns.

Following a marketing campaign by a sky lantern company to supposedly support the NHS, some people have been launching lanterns with lit candles inside them. Maybe we could remind people that they cannot launch over farmland, and they are supposed to let the coastguard know if they are going to launch over water although it is better not to launch them at all. This is all from a code of conduct agreed by DEFRA in 2014.

Communication will be coming from Babergh soon with the same information as this issue was discussed at Cabinet last week. Babergh banned the release of sky lanterns from its land some time ago and Farmers Weekly have also decried this; many farmers don't allow release from their land, but councils can't stop people releasing from their own private land/gardens etc.

COVID-19 testing facility at Copdock

As part of its national COVID-19 testing programme, the Government is creating a 'Drive Thru' testing facility on the outskirts of Ipswich. At this point, testing is only available to symptomatic NHS staff and public sector key workers, and members of their household. Based on the existing Park and

Ride site at Copdock Mill, off the A12 and A14 Junction, the facility will offer those key workers from the eastern region the opportunity to get tested so that they can be supported to report to work as soon as is practicable. This is one of up to 50 sites being created around the country. The site is not open for the use of the public. All eligible staff will receive notification and instructions directly from their employer. This is a Government-led programme, supported by the Suffolk Resilience Forum and partners in Essex.

Small Business Grant Fund

As of this week, over £21.2m of grant funding has been distributed and Babergh have redeployed five members of staff to proactively call eligible businesses who have not yet applied.

Village Halls

There have had some specific enquiries about the eligibility of our Village Halls for grants so here is more detail for you. Village Halls may be eligible for a grant under one of the Government's Business Support Grant Schemes:

- If the ratepayer for the Village Hall is in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) they may be entitled to a grant of £10,000.
- If the ratepayer for the Village Hall is not in receipt of SBRR, they may qualify for a grant as a Retail, Hospitality and Leisure property (RHL). They may be entitled to a £25,000 grant if the rateable value of the property is between £15,001 and £51,000; or a £10,000 grant if the rateable value is up to and including £15,000. (This has been a recent change to the Government RHL grants scheme).

To be eligible for a grant the ratepayer for the Village Hall must not be the Parish Council as grants cannot be paid to Local Authorities or precepting authorities.

Financial support for local sports clubs and groups

Sports clubs are part of the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure sector and are eligible to apply for the small business grant however, to date, there has been little take up from them. Next week I will be provided with a list of sports clubs and groups in my ward and I will encourage them individually to take up the grant to which they are entitled.

Planning decisions

The first virtual meeting for Babergh District Council Planning Committee is scheduled for 9:30am on Thursday 30 April. Babergh are working with IT to ensure that there is a suitable platform for this, which will enable the public and press to observe the meeting.

Housing - Accommodation Task and Finish Group

There have been some structural changes to the way the county-wide Accommodation Task & Finish Group is working to ensure that it remains responsive through this prolonged Coronavirus pandemic. The Task Force is identifying and implementing solutions to any housing related challenges including the demand and supply of housing for those that require an immediate accommodation solution. The Task Force is made up of representatives from all the county's local authorities, Suffolk County Council's Children and Young People and Adult Services, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Public Health, Probation and Police, and is chaired by Gavin Fisk.

Our communities

Since the beginning of the pandemic an incredible network of Town and Parish Councils, Good Neighbour Schemes, welfare charities and local community groups has emerged to provide support for vulnerable residents within their areas. These groups are all doing an amazing job of meeting the needs that

exist within communities but there will inevitably be some people who, for whatever reason, aren't able to connect with these support networks. Our communities team continued to work over the Easter weekend and thanks to the fantastic local support networks in place they only received 21 referrals from the Home But Not Alone helpline, which is in place to provide urgent assistance for vulnerable residents who have no other support available. The freephone service (0800 876 6926) is staffed seven days a week, between 9am and 5pm.

A postcard containing this information, as well as other useful phone numbers, is due to be sent out to all residents in Suffolk during the week commencing 27 April. This is designed to be a 'safety net' to try and ensure we are not missing any vulnerable person or family who is isolated and in need of help.

In addition to offering financial support, and with so many different groups to recognise, our Councils are launching a #communitychampions social media campaign to encourage community groups to highlight what they are doing, making residents aware of what local help is available as well as generating further support and offers of volunteering. Taking part in the campaign couldn't be easier; groups can simply tag @BaberghDistrict in social media posts so that this can be shared.

Cllr Derek Davis, Cabinet Member for Communities for Babergh District Council said:

"During social distancing, we can remain united through kindness and looking out for one another. I'd like to thank communities in Babergh who have demonstrated immense strength and resilience at a time of national emergency. They are doing an amazing job and we want to recognise their efforts. We still need help to continue this invaluable support and I'd urge anyone wishing to volunteer, as well as any existing community groups, to

register on the Tribe Volunteer app, which is available on both Apple and Android. This will enable our communities' team to identify where resource is and if there are any gaps in the system, ensuring we can help those who need it most."

Essential grounds maintenance changes

To ensure residents' health and safety while using our parks, open spaces and amenity areas during lockdown, Babergh have commenced a full schedule of grass cutting, while continuing to monitor the situation moving forward. Litter picking will be targeted at specific problem areas, and litter and dog bins will continue to be emptied as normal. Staff are continuing to apply appropriate social distancing measures.

Waste

In Babergh there has been a reduction in fly-tipping during lockdown, compared to usual; we continue to investigate every complaint. Fly-tipping can be reported via the form on the Babergh website. However, there has been an approximately 5% increase in waste collections across the district. Please remember that the message is to reduce waste wherever possible. There is information and guidance on Suffolk Recycling's social media and on their website. If we can store clean, dry recycling it will help ease the pressure on our crews and the waste system so we can protect services for them.

If every one of our tens of thousands of households puts out just a couple of extra bags each, it means more than an additional 160,000 bags, putting further strain on our collections. Garden waste collections remain suspended until further notice, with guidance for residents on our website and further website. Crucially, this is the only way we can maintain the same level of service for the other more critical waste functions and allow them to operate normally, although, we continue to monitor the situation daily.

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

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