

GREAT BLAKENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of Gt Blakenham Parish Council meeting held on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2026 at Parish Rooms. Present: Chair Nick Leonard, Cllr Matt Powell ,Cllr Debbie Kemp, Karen Grimwood (Parish Clerk), MSDC Cllr Adrienne Marriott and 3 members of the public.**

AGENDA

1. To receive and approve any apologies for absence – **SCC Chris Chambers and Cllr Karen Wheeler**
  
2. Declaration of any pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests a. Councillor's declaration of interest appropriate to any item on the agenda.- **Cllr Leonard in regards to 8a Headway** b. To receive written requests for dispensations for disclosable pecuniary interest (if any) **None** c. To grant any requests for dispensations as appropriate **.None** d. Co-option of parish councillor(s) / to sign declaration of acceptance. **None**
  
3. Public Forum
  - a. To receive the report from the County Councillor – **See attached report . The Parish Council wished to thank Cllr Chamers for arranging the emergency repairs to the potholes on the B1133, leading to the Claydon Roundabout. It was noted that only some of the potholes have been filled, and further repairs will be required. According to the Highways reporting tool, the remaining repairs have been scheduled since 10th February 2026. The Clerk will monitor the situation to ensure that the remaining repairs are completed.**
  
  - b. To receive the report from the District Councillor – **See attached report** c. To receive questions from members of the public – **None**
  
4. To approve the Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2026 - **Approved**
  
5. To note the Clerk's update from previous Meetings.
  - a. Allotment clearance – **Have not received a response from landowners solicitors in regards to clearance of land. Clerk has chased twice.**
  
  - b. Land Stowmarket Road – **Have not received a response from land agent in regards to leasing the land.**
  
6. Planning
  - a. To consider the following planning applications.

DC/350520/  DC/26/00065	Units 5 To 6 29 Gipping Road Great Blakenham Suffolk	Retrospective planning application for the stationing of a Portakabin and use as an office (Use Class E(g)(i)) in conjunction with the existing uses on the site and the creation of 5 associated parking spaces  <b>The Parish Council objected to the application on the grounds of the absence of a lighting assessment, concerns about noise pollution, and concerns received from residents.</b>
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DC/25/05114	Land At Field Quarry (Also Known As Masons Quarry) Bramford Road Great Blakenham (Part In The Parishes Of Little	Outline planning permission (with layout, scale, appearance and landscaping being reserved) for the extension of Port One Logistics Park
	Blakenham, Nettlestead And Baylham) IP6 0XJ	<b>The Parish Council resolved to object to the application on the following grounds: it is contrary to the adopted Local Plan; highways concerns; impacts on nature and biodiversity; failure to adhere to previous Section 106 agreements; and the results of the community survey highlighting significant concerns regarding the impact on the village and local infrastructure.</b>
DC/25/03044 – Reserved Matters	Port One Business And Logistics Park , Bramford Road, Little Blakenham (Part In The Parish Of Great Blakenham), IP6 0RL	Application for Approval of Reserved Matters following approval of Outline ((Hybrid) Planning Application DC/22/06288 dated 09/05/2024 Town and Country Planning (Development Planning Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) details to be considered for Appearance Scale and Layout for Units 14 and 15 of the Port One Business and Logistics Park. The outline application was not an EIA.  <b>The Parish Council objected to the application on the grounds that a full updated Transport Assessment has not been provided and that further transport evidence is required prior to determination.</b>

b. To note any planning determinations. –

DC/25/00445	The Chequers Inn, 19 Stowmarket Road, Great Blakenham, Ipswich Suffolk IP6 0LP	Application under S73a for Removal or Variation of a Condition following grant of Planning Permission DC/23/00589 <b>Noted</b>
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## 7. Growth, Highways, and Infrastructure

### a. Port One -

**At the last meeting with the Planning Department, it was suggested that the planning application expiry date may be extended to the end of March 2026, but this has not yet been confirmed, nor is it clear whether the extension would apply to the public or only to parish councils.**

**The seven parishes forming the Parish Alliance have met to discuss formally objecting to the Port One Planning Application and considered engaging professional support from a planning consultancy. A quote was obtained for £3,300 plus VAT to review the application, identify key issues, and prepare arguments against the proposal based on local planning policy, site suitability, and the need for a full Environmental Impact Assessment. It was suggested that the Parish Alliance commit up to £5,000 for this work, with costs allocated across the parishes via the precept, which would result in a potential cost of £1,019 for Great Blakenham. The Parish Council is happy, in principle, to pay this amount but advised caution, recommending that a final decision be deferred until a more defined plan is available, as the application could be amended and the approach may need to adapt.**

**Community Survey - The Parish Council undertook a community survey to gather residents' views on the proposed development. We received 91 responses via both hard copy submissions and the online community platform. The results demonstrate significant concern among residents regarding the potential impact of the development on the village, its infrastructure, and its environment. Key Concerns Identified:**

- **Traffic Levels & Congestion (63%)** A majority of respondents expressed concern about increased traffic volumes and the potential impact on daily routines, safety, and journey times.
- **Pressure on Roads & Infrastructure (63%)** Residents are worried about the additional strain on local roads, utilities, and public services resulting from increased traffic and development.
- **Wildlife & Environmental Impact (60%)** Many respondents highlighted concerns about the potential effects on local flora, fauna, and overall environmental quality.
- **HGV Routes & Numbers (32%)** The movement and volume of heavy goods vehicles through the village were identified as a significant concern, particularly in relation to safety, noise, and road suitability.
- **Road Safety (23%)** Concerns were raised about increased risks to pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. • **Drainage & Flooding (14%)** Residents are worried about flood risk, water management, and whether existing drainage systems are adequate to cope with additional development.
- **Air Quality (12%)** Some respondents expressed concerns about the potential deterioration of air quality due to increased traffic and activity.
- **Light Pollution (7%)** Respondents noted that additional lighting associated with development could negatively affect the rural character and night environment.
- **Noise (6%)** Increased noise levels from traffic and construction were also identified as an area of concern.
- **Impact on Village Character (31%)** Maintaining the village's heritage, visual character, and strong sense of community was highlighted as an important priority, with residents concerned that development could alter the village's identity and overall feel.

- b. Discuss Piip plan - Agreed that it may be beneficial to undertake a Piip plan. Cllr Kemp to investigate the work required and lead on this.

## 8. Governance

- a. Funding requests – Agreed to award £500 donations to the following charities: Headway, Citizens Advice, Lighthouse Women's Aid, Oxygen Therapy Centre, and Communities Together.  
Cllr Leonard had previously declared an interest in Headway and therefore did not participate in the discussion or decision regarding that donation.
- b. Earmarked reserves – PC agreed to earmarked reserves for the new financial year .

£50,000 - Village hall sustainability

£10,000 - Obtaining lease and planting management for Meadows on Stowmarket Road

£3000 - Election Costs

£2000 – Port One Consultancy costs

c. Note MSDC Consultations – Noted

d. Note Salc Internal Audit Service – Noted the increase in audit costs. Agreed that PC would engage the auditors to complete the upcoming internal audit.

#### 9. Village Maintenance

a. Note nature recovery grant – Noted. Cllr Leonard to see if he can attend the launch.

#### 10 Finance

a. To consider approving and making the following payments – Payments Approved

Payroll	BACS	Payroll ending Jan 2026	£1075.63	LGA 1972 s111
Nest Pension	DD	Month 10 ending 31.01.2026	£53.99	LGA 1972 s111
Glasdons	BACS	3 x slim grit bins	£672.88	LGA 1972 s111
Anglian water (Wave)	DD	9.10.25 – 08.01.26 - 16051228	£175.84	LGA 1972 s111
Three	DD	Phone contracts	£33.98	LGA 1972 s111
Parish Rooms	DD	Room hire 2026	£200.00	LGA 1972 s111
Unity Trust	DD	Bank Service Charge	£6.00	LGA 1972 s111
Shades	BACS	Street cleaning as per tender - 2815	£1213.33	LGA 1972 s111
Shades	BACS	Ground maintenance as per tender - 2816	£758.33	LGA 1972 s111
Lloyds	DD	Card service charge	£3.00	LGA 1972 s111

#### Bank Balance @ 31.01.2026

Unity Trust Current Account Balance -£ 31,926.27 Unity Trust Saver Account Balance - £165,181.79 Total - £197,108.06

#### 11. Reports:

a. Village Hall - No update had been received from the Village Hall. Invoices had been received for the upgraded fire and security systems: SOS Services £2,376.00 and CFS East Anglia Ltd £7,438.22 (total £9,814.22). Contributions received were £1,000 from Mid Suffolk District Council (03/11/25 – Cllr Marriott) and £1,404 from SCC Chris Chambers). The remaining balance of £7,410.22 was previously agreed to be paid by the Parish Council. The Parish Council agreed that the payment would be met from the £50,000 earmarked reserves, thereby reducing the total available in the new financial year.

#### 12. Correspondence

a. Email regarding Boardly & Roberts land - A resident has raised concerns regarding the use of the land adjacent to Boardly and Roberts, specifically relating to planning permission and the impact of the existing lighting on nearby properties. MSDC have confirmed that a planning application (ref DC/25/01207) is currently under consideration for part of the site for the operation of Claydon Executive Travel, while the remainder of the site benefits from permission for B8 use (storage or distribution). The lighting system, installed approximately eight years ago, was temporarily non-operational due to a technical fault, which has now been rectified, and is primarily intended for security purposes. Landowner has indicated his willingness to engage with residents regarding specific lighting concerns and is prepared to implement adjustments, including converting the lights to motion-sensitive operation if required.

**13. Future meetings**

- a. To note invitation for items to be considered in the next meeting.
- b. To note the date of the next scheduled Meeting on **12<sup>th</sup> March 2026** and any items for the agenda.

Karen Grimwood -Email: [clerk@greatblakenhamparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@greatblakenhamparishcouncil.gov.uk)

# Local Matters

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## Council sets out plans for 2026/27 budget

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The £850 million plan aims to safeguard frontline services, support the most vulnerable, and invest in Suffolk's future – despite rising costs, growing demand and shortfalls in national funding.

Key themes of the draft budget include:

- **Savings and efficiencies:** £46.5 million of savings through service transformation and efficiencies, including a temporary reduction in employer pension contributions, made possible by the strong position of the council's pension fund.
- **Rising financial pressures:** Increasing demand, in particular for adult and children's social care, will add £32.2 million in costs, alongside continued pressures from the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit.
- **Reserves:** A one-off use of reserves will bridge a £5.9 million funding gap, while keeping reserves above the minimum level needed to manage financial risks.
- **Capital investment:** The capital programme has been shortened from four years to three ahead of local government reorganisation in 2028. It continues to fund essential projects like school expansions and infrastructure upgrades, as well as new schemes, such as improvements to bus services, public rights of way, and cycling and walking infrastructure.

## Department for Education acknowledges progress - and sets clear expectations for Suffolk's SEND improvement

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In a recent stocktake visit, officers from the DfE reported progress in governance, quality assurance and timeliness, leadership and multi-agency working. They praised a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND and laid out a number of recommendations for further improvement.

SEND services in Suffolk are delivered in partnership by Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (iCB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum and education settings.


The findings of the stocktake visit have been published in a letter addressed to Sarah-Jane Smedmor, Executive Director of Children & Young People's Services at Suffolk County Council, and Dr Ed Garratt OBE, Chief Executive Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board. You can read the letter [here](#).

The DfE acknowledged work to clear the backlog of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) by January and the fact that plans will be delivered above the national average for timeliness. Officers noted a need to ensure that plans reflect families' views and lead to timely, appropriate support.

**Chris Chambers - County Councillor for the Gipping Valley Division**

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## Suffolk County Council backs new 20mph speed limit policy for communities

A new 20mph speed limit policy to enhance road safety and improve quality of life across Suffolk's communities has been agreed by county councillors.

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet has backed the proposal to make it easier to reduce the speed limit, where appropriate, in residential and high-pedestrian areas to 20mph. Under the new scheme any applications for a 20mph limit in an area where recorded average traffic speeds are 28mph or under is likely to be approved.

Under the scheme, areas with recorded speeds of:

- Below 28mph – likely to be accepted, with a speed limit sign only, although signs warning that a 20mph zone is ahead may be required
- Between 28 - 32mph - unlikely to be acceptable with signing alone. Gateway signing and traffic calming throughout the area may be required
- Above 32mph - Unlikely to be acceptable without extensive traffic calming measures such as road humps, plus night-time lighting. It would also be subject to a Road Safety Audit

The new policy will come into immediate effect for all new applications.

## Action Taken on Early Morning HGV Parking on Highways

I am aware of ongoing concerns from residents in Great Blakenham about HGVs arriving too early and parking illegally on the B1113 near Masons Landfill.

After these issues were raised with me, I contacted Masons Landfill directly to urge immediate action to address early arrivals and unsafe or illegal parking. As a result, a series of strengthened measures are now being implemented with immediate effect.

What is changing

- A traffic marshal is already in place and will now be positioned at the entrance to the lane from Bramford Road from 6:00am every morning.
- No vehicles will be permitted to enter the site before 6:45am.
- Any vehicle arriving before this time will be turned away and not accepted for at least one hour.
- Repeat offenders will be issued with a "red card", resulting in a three-month ban from the site.

**Chris Chambers - County Councillor for the Gipping Valley Division**

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It has also been identified that some drivers have been attempting to avoid enforcement by parking further along the B1113, out of sight of the traffic marshal.

## To address this:

- A member of staff from Masons Landfill will now carry out patrols around Great Blakenham before 6:45am.
- Any vehicle found to be parked illegally and destined for the landfill will be issued with a red card and barred from the site.

## Communication with hauliers:

Masons Landfill is issuing an immediate notification to all known customers and hauliers, making it clear that:

- Illegal parking will not be tolerated
- Vehicles breaching the rules will be banned from the site
- The message must be passed on to any third-party operators

## Ongoing monitoring:

I will continue to monitor the situation closely and remain in contact with both residents and the operator. If problems persist, I will press for further enforcement action.

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## Fisons Site Left in Limbo

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It is an absolute kick in the teeth for residents to see the latest assessment for the former Fisons site on Paper Mill Lane.

Despite the desperate need for progress, the site has been stalled at "Stage 1" and deemed unsuitable for the Joint Local Plan. Why? Because of "ownership uncertainty."

Why this matters:

- **Planning Paralysis:** This decision makes it even harder for future development or planning applications to move forward. We are stuck with a "Not Suitable" label that could ward off investment for years.
- **A Public Safety Hazard:** We all know the reality on the ground—this site is a death trap. It is unsafe, decaying, and a magnet for trespassing.
- **Neglect:** While the paperwork stalls, the site continues to rot. Simply saying "ownership is unknown" isn't good enough when the community is living with an eyesore that poses a genuine risk to life.

Bramford deserves better than a derelict landmark left to crumble.

**Chris Chambers - County Councillor for the Gipping Valley Division**

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## **DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT FEBRUARY 26**

### **Councils support Ipswich ambition to be City of Culture**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are backing Ipswich's bid to become City of Culture 2029 – saying it deserves Suffolk-wide support. Cllr Andy Mellon, Mid Suffolk District Council Leader said “Mid Suffolk has many residents who work in the town and use its facilities...so we can show the bid has wider support”. He went on to say that putting a bid together would have a huge positive effect on Ipswich, bringing cultural partners around the table and sparking new ideas and collaborations towards a shared vision of the future.

### **Boosting biodiversity by funding nature in your neighbourhood**

Local groups are being urged to apply for new funding from Mid Suffolk District Council, designed to connect people with nature and restore natural habitats within communities. Mid Suffolk's new Community Nature Recovery Fund was launched on 20<sup>th</sup> January. It will offer up to £50K for projects that protect and expand wildlife corridors and habitats within the district. One application can be made per project, per year and the deadline for applications for the first round of funding is Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March. To find out more details or to submit an application, visit the Mid Suffolk District Council Community Funding page.

### **Helping households to save money, eat well and reduce food waste**

Households across Suffolk can now get free access to Five Dinners – an award-winning meal planner which helps them eat healthily, save money and reduce food waste. Feel Good Suffolk – a collaboration

between all Suffolk's local authorities and NHS partners – provides free support to residents who want to manage their weight, get more active and stop smoking. The service has team with FiveDinners.com – the online platform founded by TV chef and author Theo Michaels. Households across the county will receive free premium access to this platform for a year after visiting <https://FiveDinners.com/MyCommunity>.

Once registered they will receive a meal plan every week, tailored to their needs and preferences.

## **Councils call for urgent reform of sewage sludge regulations**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are calling for urgent action by the Government to tighten regulations governing the spreading of sewage sludge on agricultural land, citing serious concerns for public health, farming and the environment. Evidence has shown the presence of “forever chemicals”, microplastics, pharmaceuticals and hormone-disrupting substances in the sludge, many of which are not routinely tested. At their January full Council meetings members supported writing to the Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

## **Find out how much heat your home is losing – by borrowing a thermal camera for free**

Suffolk residents can now borrow a thermal camera from their local library for free to detect where heat is escaping their homes and take action to stop the leaks. Sustainable Suffolk and the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (including Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils) have previously loaned out thermal cameras to community groups through their project called Keep the Heat. Since 2022, over 153 community groups have taken part in this project, surveying almost 2000 homes across Suffolk. An extension of this project now

enables Suffolk residents over 18, who are library members to collect a camera from Ipswich County Library as one would collect a book.

## **New local powers to keep pavements clear**

On 8 January, the Department for Transport announced new local powers to be made available to local leaders in England to introduce pavement parking restrictions in their area, helping keep them clear and accessible for everyone who uses them, while allowing exemptions where needed

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-local-powers-to-keep-pavements-clear-for-those-who-rely-on-them-most>.

Following a public consultation, the Department for Transport has confirmed that local leaders will be given new and improved legal powers to make it easier to restrict pavement parking across wider areas, rather than relying on the previous approach, where action is often limited to individual streets and requires lengthy, complex processes.

Under the new approach, local leaders will be able to decide to take action on pavement parking whilst retaining flexibility where they deem pavement parking may still be acceptable.

The department will set out guidance to help councils use these powers in a proportionate and locally appropriate way later in 2026.

## **Hospices in England to receive additional funding**

On 7 January, the Minister of State for Care, Stephen Kinnock MP, announced that hospices in England will receive an additional £25 million in capital funding at a Select Committee on Palliative Care.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/event/26150/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/>

The funding will upgrade over 170 hospices, including urgent repairs, improved facilities and patient rooms, enhanced outdoor spaces, and better IT equipment.

## **Disabled Facilities Grant additional funding announced**

On 10 January, the Department of Health and Social Care announced an additional £50 million of government funding to help more older people and people with disabilities adapt their homes to live independently.

The additional funding for the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) in 2025-26 could support around 5,000 more people to install vital home adaptations such as stairlifts, ramps, accessible bathrooms and assistive technologies. These assistive technologies include automatic door openers, lifts, height adjustable surfaces, ceiling track hoists, and smart technology for light and heat.

The DFG supports around 60,000 older people and people with disabilities each year, with an average grant of around £10,000.

The funding will be allocated to councils in February and brings total DFG funding for 2025 to 2026 to £761 million.

## **Disability Confident scheme overhauled to improve workplace standards for disabled people**

On 15<sup>th</sup> January the Department for Work and Pensions announced that sick and disabled people will have more opportunities to move into work, following the overhaul of the Disability Confident Scheme.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/disability-confident-scheme-overhauled-to-boost-workplace-standards-for-disabled-people>

While around two thirds of employers agree that joining the scheme had a positive impact on their organisation, the Keep Britain Working review

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-britain-working-review-final-report/keep-britain-working-final-report>

by Sir Charlie Mayfield published in November 2025 concluded that while it has many positive aspects it “lacks teeth”.

In response to the review, the government is overhauling the ‘Disability Confident’ scheme to help prevent ill-health, support people to stay in work, and help employers build healthier, more resilient workplaces.

The reforms are aimed at making employers’ experience on the scheme more meaningful and more impactful on their organisations, incentivising them to progress their Disability Confident status and make their workplaces inclusive of disabled talent.

## **Letter from Minister of State for Housing and Planning to the Planning Inspectorate: Modifying planning obligations**

On 18 December 2025, the Minister of State for Housing and Planning wrote to the Planning Inspectorate about the clarification the government has provided to local planning authorities and developers regarding the use of Section 73 applications.

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-minister-of-state-for-housing-and-planning-to-the-planning-inspectorate-modifying-planning-obligations](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-minister-of-state-for-housing-and-planning-to-the-planning-inspectorate-modifying-planning-obligations)

A Section 73 application under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is used to vary or remove conditions attached to an existing planning permission. It allows for "minor material amendments" to a development—such as changing approved plans, opening hours, or materials—without submitting a completely new application. It results in a new, independent planning permission alongside the original. The new government guidelines are "to accelerate growth and housing delivery".

## **Consultation on updates to consumer standards and requirements**

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has already consulted on Competence and Conduct and Social Tenant Access to Information. On 9<sup>th</sup> December a further consultation was launched by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) to include tenant satisfaction measures and the introduction of new tenant satisfaction measures on electrical safety checks.

The Competence and Conduct requirements are aimed at driving greater professionalism and higher standards by ensuring relevant housing staff have the required skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviours to deliver a high standard of service to tenants.

Senior housing managers and executives will also be required to hold, or be working towards, a housing management qualification. RSH's consultation also sets out how it proposes to implement a new tenant satisfaction measure covering electrical safety checks.

The consultation closes at 6:30pm on 3 March.

## **New design guidance for new build developments**

On 21 January, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published an updated new build design guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-design-guidance-to-raise-the-bar-for-new-build-developments>

setting a benchmark for well-designed neighbourhoods, ensuring new developments are well-connected to local shops and services.

The guidance sets out how new homes should reflect modern life – from space to work from home to flexible layouts that adapt as families grow and cater for every stage of life.

Working together, councils and developers will use the guidance to make visible improvements for residents, including calmer streets with less traffic to improved green spaces. New builds will be expected to address and adapt to climate change, creating adequate shade and minimising potential flood risk.

The government is intending to create model design codes – set to be launched later this year – with clear rules to create successful places.

Councils will set the vision for their areas through local plans, ensuring clear design expectations using masterplans, local design codes and guides.

## **New social and affordable housing package unveiled**

On 28<sup>th</sup> January the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government unveiled new measures to give councils, housing associations and other providers greater financial support to help increase construction of new homes.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-more-families-to-get-warm-secure-social-homes>

Landlords will also have to meet robust standards to provide homes that are warm and energy efficient and free of disrepair and damp through a new Decent Homes Standard (DHS), updating decency standards for the first time in 20 years.

This is on top of new requirements to upgrade properties under new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards that could save social tenants money on their energy bills.

The latest update comes ahead of bidding opening next month for the £39 billion Social and Affordable Homes Programme.

The government will work with providers, councils, and developers to agree a framework to get the Section 106 market moving again.

The government has also announced the process to agree a compact with the social housing sector, urging all providers to come forward with ambitious pledges to increase housing supply. A new social housing taskforce, made up of key experts, will hold the sector to account on delivering new homes.

Other measures include:

- Making £2.5 billion in loans available to private registered providers of social housing at just 0.1% interest.
- Allocating an extra £3.5 million through the Council Housebuilding Support Fund for councils to draw up plans for more council homes.
- Increasing the Housing Revenue Account threshold – a ringfenced account for income and spending on councils' own housing stock – from 200 to 1,000 homes.

- Extending the discounted borrowing rate for council housebuilding from the government's lending facility, the Public Works Loan Board.
- Confirming how social rent convergence will be implemented so providers can bring rents that are currently below the government's formula up to that level over time.

## **Government launches Warm Homes Plan**

On 20<sup>th</sup> January, the government launched the Warm Homes Plan to help families across the country see lower energy bills.

The Plan will deliver £15 billion of public investment, roll out upgrades to up to five million homes that could help save them hundreds on energy bills.

The Plan will target help at low-income families, alongside a universal offer, to ensure that families can feel the benefits of products that can cut their bills.

Alongside this, the Plan will support consumer choice for all households, so people can choose the technologies that work for them as and when they want. Homeowners will be able to apply for government-backed, low and zero interest loans to install solar panels.

Furthermore on 29 January, the government announced the extension of the Warm Home Discount through to 2031

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/energy-bill-support-extended-for-millions-of-families>

providing eligible households with a £150 rebate on their energy bills.

## **COVID-19 Day of Reflection 2026**

The COVID-19 Day of Reflection:

<https://dayofreflection.campaign.gov.uk/>

takes place on 8 March. Events and activities can take place in the week before and surrounding days.

Last year over 200 events were added to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) map, including almost 50 council-led events. We saw how important the day was for those involved. It is an opportunity to remember lives lost, reflect on the sacrifices made by many, recognise many are still feeling the impact of the pandemic, and pay tribute to all key workers and volunteers.

There are many ways to get involved – providing an opportunity for people to share their reflections or promoting local spaces for reflection or events. Councils may wish to make use of information on the campaign website which includes education resources including stories from the pandemic, a toolkit and more.

Councils can submit events and activities in their area to show how they are getting involved. For any questions please contact: [covid.commemoration@dcms.gov.uk](mailto:covid.commemoration@dcms.gov.uk)

## **Mobile homes: Fit and proper person test re-application starts on 1 August**

MHCLG is reminding councils that the fit and proper person test re-application process will commence on 1 August. Councils must be prepared to receive and assess applications from site owners by that date.

A fit and proper person test for those operating land as a residential park (mobile) home site was introduced on 1 October 2021. All park home site owners were required to apply by that

date, for themselves or the person appointed to manage the site, to be assessed and placed on a local fit and proper person register. A person can be placed on a register for up to five years, after which they must apply to the council to be re-assessed.

Guidance for councils on implementation of the fit and proper person test and setting a fee policy is available on gov.uk.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-homes-fit-and-proper-person-test-guidance-for-local-authorities>

Further information about the re-application process will be published shortly. If you have any questions, please contact: [parkhomes@communities.gov.uk](mailto:parkhomes@communities.gov.uk)

## Public health update

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### **Norovirus cases still rising but overall trend decreasing**

On 29 January, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) reminded people of the steps they can take to halt the spread of norovirus:

Latest data shows that cases have increased 18.3% in the last two weeks, compared to the previous two-week period. While older people continue to account for most cases of the vomiting bug, activity has also increased in children under the age of five in recent weeks.

Common symptoms of norovirus include:

- nausea and vomiting
- diarrhoea
- high temperature
- abdominal pain
- aching limbs

Good hand hygiene is important to stop norovirus spreading. To stop norovirus spreading, you should:

- wash your hands thoroughly using soap and warm water after using the toilet or contact with a sick individual and before preparing and eating food
- stay off school or work until you have not been sick or had diarrhoea for at least 2 days
- not rely on alcohol gels instead of washing your hands, as these do not kill the virus
- wash any contaminated clothing or bedding using detergent at 60°C using disposable gloves to handle any items
- use bleach-based cleaners to disinfect surfaces

If you catch norovirus, stay home for 48 hours after your symptoms clear.

UKHSA has a poster available explaining norovirus, its symptoms, how to prevent it from spreading and details on recovery:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/stop-norovirus-spreading-this-winter-leaflet>

as a PDF to download, print and display.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

## **Respiratory syncytial virus vaccination for older adults: expansion of eligibility**

From 1 April, the eligibility criteria for the programme will change to allow people aged 80 years and over, and all residents in care homes for older adults, to receive the RSV vaccine on the NHS.

*Adrienne Marriott  
Blakenham District Councillor  
03/02/26*