

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Annual Report for 2021/22
For the Stowupland Annual Parish Meeting – Wednesday 18 May 2022

- Covid 19

The first national lockdown for Covid 19 was on 23rd March 2020 and since then there have been two further lockdowns and varying rules and regulations imposed. Government provided varying types of assistance and Mid Suffolk District Council administered grants to local businesses in accordance with this. The most recent Government assistance has just closed to applications.

During the lockdowns, all meetings in person were halted. This year, meetings reverted back to being in-person although following a major increase in Covid infections in January, meetings went back online for a few weeks. The Council has lobbied Government to allow hybrid meetings, where some councillors are present in person and some online, but currently this is not available for formal meetings.

- Budget

During this year, £4 million left over from the 2020/21 budget was supposed to be spent on a variety of projects put forward by all councillors. Only a small amount has been spent to date.

The budget for 2022/23 was approved for approximately £9 million on core services (slightly less than the previous year) with no increase in council tax (against the previous year's increase of 1.66%). Additionally, council home rents increased by 4.1% (against 2.7% last year) but no increase to sheltered housing service charges (which increased by £2 per week last year).

Our group put forward budget proposals to provide two electric buses to serve rural areas. This proposal was agreed, and we are awaiting progress on this. (Last year we withdrew our proposals on the basis that the additional £4 million spend would be agreed by all councillors.)

The Council is on track for an underspend against budget of just over £1 million for the financial year 2021/22. We hope this funding can be allocated to projects across the district.

- Investments

The Council has invested in several large-scale projects:

- £690,000 has been spent on a new visitor centre at Needham Lakes which is due to open soon;
- £2.8 million of energy measures at the district's leisure centres including a solar car port at the Stowmarket centre;
- £2.5 million towards renovations and new extension to the Regal Cinema in Stowmarket which re-opened last year; and
- Over £20 million in Gateway 14, a proposed business park west of Stowmarket where work started on 25 April 2022.

Mid Suffolk District Council also borrowed £50 million via CIFCO, its separate investment vehicle, and all of this is now invested in commercial property. This property, all outside of the Mid Suffolk area, ranges from gyms to car showrooms, in places including Epsom, Harlow, Lincoln, Peterborough, Norwich and Milton Keynes. Approximately £1-1.5 million is earned each year however, during Covid, the Board of CIFCO asked for a deferral of interest payments. In the most recent report, the value of these properties has fallen.

- Economy

The Council continues to support the development of Gateway 14 which is now part of Freeport East. The business case has now been agreed by Mid Suffolk's Cabinet.

Other economic initiatives included Careeriosity where almost 200 young people attended events focussing on STEM and cultural industries. The Council held its first Local Energy Showcase which attracted over 200 visitors and several local businesses. During lockdown the Virtual High Street project was set up and this won a public sector award.

- Climate Change

In July 2019 the Council announced a Climate Emergency and set up a Task Force to recommend appropriate actions. Since then, various projects have been undertaken including the waste tankers now all operating on hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) which should cut carbon emissions by 90%. £500,000 was committed towards Climate Change initiatives but further funding has been brought in from external sources.

The Council's Climate Change and Biodiversity Annual Report highlighted the work being done:

- Sustainable Travel Plan
- Wildlife friendly street lighting
- Publicly accessible green spaces
- Biodiversity actions.

Within the biodiversity area, the Council's work includes:

- A tree canopy survey
- Initiatives to enhance wildflower verges and meadows; and
- A wildlife network map.

The Council encourages local groups to improve areas for wildlife and continues with the Tree for Life scheme as well as tree-planting across the district.

- Wellbeing

The Council put forward new strategies on Health and Wellbeing and for sustainable travel, on Walking and Cycling. A number of initiatives across the district took place during the year including Family Park Cooking session in Stowmarket, free Christmas Holiday activity session, Our Parks (free outdoor fitness sessions) in Stowmarket and the Active Schools programme.

Mid Suffolk District Council together with Suffolk County Council and Stowmarket Town Council supported the launch in July of the Chilton Fields parkrun held every Saturday morning. A range of new facilities is being planned for Chiltern Fields.

- Planning and Housing

The Council's work on the Joint Local Plan stalled when the Planning Inspector paused the examination of the Plan to allow officers to re-consult and further clarify the spatial strategy and review part of the evidence base. It was agreed that the Plan will be split into two parts – Part 1 covering all the social, environmental and economic policies and Part 2 covering those relating to housing numbers, distribution etc. The Inspector acknowledged that 90% of Mid Suffolk's housing target is already allocated (either via existing permissions or sites allocated via Neighbourhood Plans) and that this is central to future policies. The Inspector also asked that work be done on whether a lower or higher housing number should be put forward and the rationale for either. Part 1 will progress while work is being done on Part 2.

Mid Suffolk's annual monitoring report showed that 672 new dwellings were built in the district in 2020/21 - 131% of the current annual target (513 dwellings) set by the national standard methodology. 29% of these were affordable homes. There are 7,444 outstanding planning permissions (as at 01/04/21) which are either not started or under construction. Separately, it was confirmed that Mid Suffolk now has 9.54 years of housing land supply, well above the Government target of five years.

Our group presented a motion to Council calling for continued support for Neighbourhood Plans. The first review of a Neighbourhood Plan is now being done (at Mendlesham) and others are expected to follow. In the absence of an up to date local plan, Neighbourhood Plans are the most up to date planning documents as part of the Development Plan.

A number of significant planning applications and housing developments have progressed during the year:

- The Linden Homes development west of Thorney Green Road and the Landex development opposite the URC chapel have progressed during the year. A number of concerns were taken up with the developers; as work has progressed, the number of concerns has reduced.
 - The greatest concerns arose when Bloor Homes commenced work on their Phase 3 development before reserved matters had been approved. They created an access on to Gipping Road and directed HGV deliveries to be via that route. There was a wide range of complaints – safety of road users, dust, noise and congestion. SCC had agreed that Rendalls Lane and Gipping Road were suitable for HGV deliveries, but we persisted with our arguments against the use of these country lanes. MSDC agreed with us, and Bloor Homes then blocked up the access to Gipping Road. The controlled crossing at the Co-Op and minor widening of footpaths on Church Road have been carried out as a planning condition of this development.
 - A site meeting was arranged to discuss with the MSDC Chief Executive general planning concerns.
 - Meetings have been held with Taylor Wimpey to discuss their plans for developing land south of Stowmarket Road. Concerns have been expressed about the A1120/B1115 junction and the need for a roundabout at that location. This junction will see extra traffic from the Diapers Farm and Ashes Farm developments as well as the Taylor Wimpey site if development goes ahead on that land. MSDC are brokering an agreement between developers to fund a roundabout; we will continue to press for this to be provided at the earliest opportunity.
- Supporting the community

We support local events and community groups where we can particularly link local groups with external fundraising via the Mid Suffolk community team. Almost £400,000 was allocated by Mid Suffolk District Council to communities across the district.

We have supported many groups with the locality fund from Mid Suffolk which for this year was a total of £7,350 for each Councillor for the Haughley, Stowupland & Wetherden Ward. The following organisations in Stowupland gained support:

- Preschool and Mighty Oaks – Story Hut, Bike Shed and Pirate Ship
- Baby and Toddler Group – Educational Toys
- Village Hall – Water boiler, Kettles and Teapots
- Concrete base for the housing for litter bins
- Owl boxes
- Wildflower and Biodiversity Group – spring flowering bulbs

We would like to thank the Parish Council for all their work done throughout the year.

Mid Suffolk District Councillor – Haughley, Stowupland and Wetherden Ward (including Old Newton with Gipping)

Email: rachel.eburne@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Phone: 01449 673311

Keith Welham

Mid Suffolk District Councillor – Haughley, Stowupland and Wetherden Ward (including Old Newton with Gipping)

Email: keith.welham@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Phone: 01449 673185

Mid Suffolk District Council: www.midsuffolk.gov.uk 0300 123 4000