

District Councillors' Annual Report (2021/22) – Councillor Andy Mellen

Mid Suffolk District Council – Bacton Ward
(Bacton, Cotton, Finningham, Westhorpe & Wyverstone Parishes)

For Annual Parish Meetings Spring 2022

- **Governance**

The Council remain hung, with a Conservative administration. The Green party had a successful by-election result in Thurston Ward in February, retaining the seat. Many decisions are therefore being decided on the Chairman's casting vote and there has been limited collaborative working between the administration and the Green and Liberal Democrat opposition group.

Council meetings are now being held in person, but virtual platforms continue to be used for briefings and internal meetings. It is hoped that the Council will in future be able to hold 'hybrid' meetings where voting Council members need to be physically present at meetings, but some officers and members of the public will be able to make presentations and representations online.

- **Budget and investments**

Mid Suffolk's general fund budget continues to be in a healthy condition, and so there will be no raise in the district council's portion of the council tax. The council agreed the proposal from the Green and Liberal Democrat group to spend some of the Growth and Efficiency Fund to purchase 2 electric bus services to help residents get into Stowmarket, and support this service for a 2 year period. The Council's wholly-owned investment company CIFCO continues to provide revenue despite the value of the assets deteriorating.

- **Climate Change and Biodiversity**

The Council has recently adopted a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to encourage more residents to travel sustainably in the district. This plan lists various schemes across the district and prioritises these so that, where funding is available, improvements to footways and cycle paths can be made. As part of the Tree and Hedgerow planting scheme over 200 trees and around 2,500 hedgerow plants have been delivered to parishes. Over 250 trees were given to celebrate births during 2021 as part of the 'Tree for Life' scheme.

The construction of solar carports is well underway at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and the new visitor centre at Needham Lake will open this summer – an eco-friendly building.

The waste collection lorries are now all operating on hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) instead of diesel, which should cut carbon emissions by 90%.

MSDC adopted a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit as technical guidance for both developers and homeowners to help reduce the carbon footprint in new and existing buildings.

- **Housing**

The Housing Revenue budget was agreed by full Council, and as the Government has lifted the rent cap, Council tenants will see a 4.1% increase in their rent. The HRA business plan is to be developed and will include a programme of improvements to existing Council house stock as well as building and acquiring dwellings.

Part of the housing development on the old HQ site in Needham Market has been completed and this included 3 new council homes, and a further 15 affordable homes were acquired across the district in 2021. Over 100 residents were prevented from becoming homeless and the Council provided 16 dedicated beds for Rough Sleepers courtesy of grant funding. As part of the response to the Ukraine crisis, MSDC officers will be carrying out housing checks on the properties which will be offered to Ukrainian refugees, once the applications have been processed by the Home Office.

- **Planning**

Following the inspector's examination of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local plan last autumn, the inspector and the two Councils have decided to proceed with a 2-part local plan. This will enable the important social, economic and environmental policies to be published in a Part 1 Joint Local Plan which will be adopted first, whilst the remaining work on spatial strategy matters and housing allocations will be addressed in a Part 2 Joint Local Plan. MSDC currently has over 9 years housing land supply (permissions granted or in the process).

Locally we have seen work commence on three of the large developments in Bacton, with three further sites close to starting. This will inevitably result in lots of disruption and HGV traffic in the area over the next few years. We aim to minimise this by Bacton parish council holding regular coordination meetings with all the developers, and including myself as District Councillor and Andrew Stringer as County Councillor.

- **Wellbeing**

The council adopted its first Wellbeing Strategy this year. A number of initiatives across the district took place during the year including Family Park Cooking session in Stowmarket, free Christmas Holiday activity sessions, 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.

- **Economy**

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

Almost 200 young people attended the Careeriosity event in Stowmarket at October half-term, focussing on jobs in STEM and cultural industries. The Council held its first Local Energy Showcase event, which attracted over 200 visitors and several local businesses. BMSDC's Virtual High Street project won a Gold IESE award.

- **Communities**

Almost £400,00 worth of grants were distributed to support the communities across the district.

I was pleased to be able to allocate locality grants to parish councils and community groups across the five villages. These included: support for the good neighbours scheme, garden club, Bacton bowls club, contribution toward sound equipment for Bacton PC, a new coffee machine for Cotton community café and support for various jubilee-related activities.

The next tranche of locality funding is now available and I welcome applications from any community group, in particular any who have not benefitted previously.

Mid Suffolk District Council information is available via www.midsuffolk.gov.uk or by phone **0300 123 4000**

I would like to thank all the Parish Councils for their work done throughout the year.

Andrew Mellen

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