

District Councillor Report: August 2020

Covid-19	Staff are continuing to work from home, like parish councils making use of Microsoft Teams to hold virtual meetings with colleagues, Councillors, and residents. Non-urgent site inspections are not taking place. Some officers are beginning to return to their normal jobs having been seconded to different duties arising from the pandemic.
Meetings	All District Council and Committee meetings are now being held as virtual meetings using the Microsoft Teams platform. Planning meetings and full council Meetings can be viewed on YouTube.
Joint Local Plan	A new timetable has been agreed to complete the long emerging Joint Local Plan, the lack of an up to date plan has led to high numbers of speculative planning applications, and any communities having to absorb housing numbers way in excess of their locally agreed figures. Although we have agreed this new timetable it is bound to be affected by the latest Government announcements regarding freeing up “ the planning system. It is worth noting that MSDC has over 8000 homes approved were building has not commenced, four years ago this figure was 3000. Increasing this figure to 10 or 12 thousand is not going to help, we do not have a deficit in housing approvals, we have an issue with housing delivery.
Gateway 14	MSDC and the Greater South East Energy Hub (GSEEH) will be jointly funding a study into low carbon opportunities for Gateway 14, the commercial development site bought by MSDC in 2018. Green Party councillors have been pressing for the site to developed sustainably making use of green energy technology and we welcome this study to look at how low and zero carbon initiatives can be integrated into new developments. It is hoped that the findings of the study can be to be used to share learning and best practice across the region.
Cycling Strategy	MSDC has agreed a new cycling strategy, our group has worked with the ruling conservatives to deliver a much needed policy that seeks to join up the planning system between County and District to deliver on much needed Cycling infrastructure.
MSDC out of county investments	Three years ago, MSDC and Babergh set up an investment company (CIFCO) and have so far borrowed around £60 million which they have loaned to CIFCO to buy commercial properties, almost all of which are outside Suffolk. The scheme was set up to make profits to improve services for residents of the districts. A recent revaluation of the portfolio shows a loss in the last 12 months of around £3 million; with fees of some £500,000. In recent months only 50% or so of the rental due to CIFCO has been paid. A recent scrutiny of the CIFCO Business Plan for 2020/2021 raised many concerns which lead to our group calling for these out of District investment to halt, but this motion had 17 votes in favour and 17 votes for, so the motion failed to gain a majority and could not proceed.
Locality Awards	A reminder that Mid Suffolk Locality Awards are still available, If you would like to process a claim please let me know.
Disabled Facilities Grant	In the recent Performance Reporting we raised concerns, again, that the grant available is not being spent. If you know anyone who needs any kind of adaptation to their home, from a handrail to a wet room, please ask them to get in touch. The application process is very straightforward.

Councillor Andrew Stringer

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