

District Councillor Report: Andrew Stringer

March 2020

<p>General Fund Budget 2020/21</p>	<p>The budget was discussed and agreed at the full Council meeting on 27th Feb. The administration proposed a 1.66% increase in Council Tax (5p per week on a Band D property). The Government funding proposals for district councils were announced at the beginning of February, and MSDC are expecting to receive just over £4M made up of base funding, new homes bonus and rural services delivery grant. Total net expenditure of the Council is in the region of £10M so circa £6M is needed via Council Tax. The Council still has over £9M in reserves, some of which is to be used in specific projects, including another round of Member Locality Budgets and £500k for projects suggested by the Climate Change Task Group. Our amendment asking for a Suffolk Design Project, and EV charging points & discounts on parking in Stowmarket were not carried forward by 1 vote.</p>
<p>Housing Revenue Account 2020/21</p>	<p>Housing Revenue Account is a separate account that is ringfenced for Council Housing & Sheltered accommodation etc. The Government are now allowing rents to increase by CPI +1% after a period of enforced decreases. This equates to a rent increase of 2.7% (average £2.19 a week). The so-called Debt Cap has now been removed so Councils are now able to borrow funds for Housing without having to stick to the historic nominal value of the stock. MSDC have gone into partnership with Icen Homes to deliver its affordable housing development over the next few years. There is a commitment to retain RTB receipts and to increase borrowing moderately to fund such developments.</p>
<p>Opposition groups' alternative proposals.</p>	<p>The Green group and Lib Dem group have been working together on an alternative budget since November. Some of the ideas put forward were incorporated into the administration's budget, but we still didn't feel enough was being done to future proof Mid Suffolk. We proposed that MSDC should build some zero-carbon homes, and promote more EV charging points in our towns, encourage more residents to spend time in Stowmarket and increase resources for additional highways expertise in planning. This proposal fell.</p>
<p>Gateway 14</p>	<p>MSDC agreed to go enter a development management agreement with Jaynic Properties Limited to promote and develop the Gateway 14 site. The site currently has outline planning consent for B1, B2 and B8 uses. It is hoped that by agreeing this working partnership the site can be promoted and developed. Part of the site was designated a Food Enterprise Zone and hopes to benefit from low carbon heat and energy solutions.</p>
<p>Needham Market station improvements</p>	<p>Needham Market station is to benefit from a grant of £380,000 to improve accessibility to the Ipswich bound platform. The application was the result of a coordinated partnership approach between Greater Anglia, Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and the Needham Market Volunteer Group.</p>
<p>Planning</p>	<p>BMSDC Development Management team has been shortlisted in the Best Use of Digital and Technology category at the annual iESE – Public Sector Transformation Awards 2020. This award recognises the innovative use of digital tools and technology in order to improve services for residents. The planning application process has been streamlined for residents and we have become one of the top performing authorities for timely planning decisions. Public searches for planning information leapt from 600K in 2017 to 1.3m in 2018, with the introduction of electronic case management.</p>

CLlr Andrew Stringer