

District Councillors' Report for Parish Councils – December 2021

Peer Review Into MSDC Planning	<p>Mid Suffolk Has conducted a “Peer Review” to address several concerns. There is concern that some Councillors & Communities have lost confidence in how the planning process is operating to genuinely represent their local interests. This may be the inevitable consequence of a finely balanced political environment but what more can be done to manage or address this so that the planning process can maintain its integrity so that the decisions are undertaken, on behalf of communities, in a fair, impartial and transparent way.</p> <p>Some Councillors feel that they should have more local autonomy and find it difficult to accept the authority of national policy in determining planning applications, particularly those involving multiple applications within the same area or where there is strong local opposition to the proposals. Given the ‘out of date’ status of some current District policies and limited weight attached to emerging policies, what alternative approaches which can deliver robust decision making should be explored?</p> <p>There appears to be limited mature discussion between Committee Members and Officers in advance of “overturn” decisions in the manner described in “Probity in Planning” and some Councillors consider that such discussions only give advance notice of intention and enable Officers to ‘find ways around areas of concern’.</p> <p>Some Councillors also feel they should be given more support when they wish to make a decision that runs counter to officer recommendations. Once a resolution to overturn an Officer recommendation is gaining traction in debate there is often a pressure to proceed swiftly with any related advice. This places pressure on Officers to alert Councillors to risks, advise on planning/non planning issues and generally provide objective advice on the course of action emerging.</p> <p>How well do planning officers and Councillors engage to discuss planning matters at an early stage and throughout the process? How could this be improved to strengthen the relationship, instil confidence in the process and improve planning outcomes?</p> <p>Are officers energised or bruised when they present applications to committee and what can be done to ensure Officers are valued for their professional work regardless of the recommendations? Given that Officers at all career grades present applications to committee what steps can be taken to ensure there is a positive and developmental experience for junior officers which builds confidence in the planning approach of Councillors even when applications are overturned?</p> <p>What happens when things go wrong, do we see this as an opportunity to improve or do we become more risk averse? Are Councillors in a position to be able to provide leadership and vision?</p> <p>A Full report will be published to answer the questions posed.</p>
Tree For Life Project	<p>A Tree for Life scheme in Babergh and Mid Suffolk which offers a free tree for new parents, is open for 2021 applications.</p> <p>The scheme is open to all families in the districts who have or are welcoming a new arrival between 1 January and 31 December 2021. Parents who may have lost a child during the same period are also able to apply for a remembrance tree.</p> <p>The initiative offers parents with a new born or newly adopted child the chance to mark their arrival by planting a tree. It aims to benefit families, communities and the environment by boosting tree coverage across the district.</p>

So far the councils have given out over a thousand trees through Tree for Life, with 2020 applicants collecting their trees last month following a necessary delay to allow the council to prioritise essential services during the pandemic. Expert help is always on hand on collection to advise families on their tree choice and aftercare at home.

Also open to those without a garden, a selection of the trees continue to be planted at key locations in the districts including Needham Lake, Shotley Golden Wood, Broom Hill in Hadleigh, Gallowsfield Wood in Haughley and Sproughton Millennium Green.

Over 100 families have already applied to the 2021 scheme, but the councils are encouraging even more people to apply for their tree on the councils' website before the 10 January 2022 deadline.

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