

## **District Councillor Report, Mendlesham Ward 2021/2022**

- Governance: The Green party had a very successful result a by-election in the Thurston Ward, so the Council remains hung. Many decisions are still being decided on the Chairman's vote.

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 next year's council tax will be frozen. The council agreed the proposal from the Green and Liberal Democrat group to spend some of the Growth and Efficiency Fund to provide 2 electric bus services to help residents get into Stowmarket for a 2 year period. The Council's £50,000,000.00 investment in CIFCO continues to provide rental revenue, despite the value of the assets deteriorating since being purchased from government loan board borrowing.

- Climate Change and Biodiversity

The Council has recently adopted the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure plan to encourage more residents to travel sustainably in the district.

As part of the Tree and Hedgerow planting scheme over 200 trees and c2,500 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 a solar carport is well underway at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and the new visitor centre at Needham Lake will be opened this summer.

The waste freighters are now all operating on hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) 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 have now lifted the rent cap, Council tenants will see a 4.1% increase in their rent. The HRA business plan is to be developed and hopes to include a programme of improvements to existing Council 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 report on the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local plan, the Councils have decided to proceed with a 2-part local plan. This will enable the important social, economic and environmental objectives 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.

This year we managed to get clarity on the status of Neighbourhood plans in the decision making process, where a Neighbourhood Plan has an up to date allocations policy, this plan coupled to the National Planning Policy Framework, becomes the document with the most weight in decision making. This clarification was the result of many legal rulings, and decisions from the planning inspectorate.

Thorndon also had their Neighbourhood Plan "made" this year after a successful referendum.

We also had a Peer Review into our planning service, Councillors and officers from outside Suffolk spent many hours questioning and looking at footage of our meetings, The report found some major challenges as well as opportunities.

We are about to draw up a plan of changes to our practises that should make the whole planning experience a more understandable and worthwhile experience.

- 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 its development of Gateway 14 which is now part of Freeport East. The business case has now been agreed by Cabinet. Almost 200 young people attended the Careeriosity event focussing on STEM and cultural industries. The Council held it's first Local Energy Showcase which attracted over 200 visitors and several local businesses. BMSDC's Virtual High Street project won a Gold IESE award.

- Communities

Almost £240,000.00 was allocated from the Community Infrastructure levy pool, to fund the extension of Mendlesham Surgery,

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