

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Annual Report for 2022/23
For the Stowupland Annual Parish Meeting – Wednesday 12 April 2023

- Budget

In the 2022/23 budget a scheme to provide two electric buses, proposed by our group, was agreed. This scheme was put on hold by the Cabinet and it is hoped to get this going in 2023.

The budget for 2023/24 was approved for approximately £15.5 million on core services (up from £13 million the year before, mainly due to inflation) with no increase in council tax. Council home rents increased by 7% (against 4.1% last year) and a 7% increase in sheltered housing service charges (against no increase last year) as well as increase in utility charges. All these increases are due to inflation, costs of energy and other cost increases.

Our group put forward budget proposals for a £2 million investment in energy efficiency measures for housing in the district and this was agreed. We hope to see this implemented in the next six months or so.

The Council has reserves of over £21 million as at the end of the financial year. This is expected to increase to nearly £23 million over 2023/24. We hope this funding can be allocated to projects across the district.

- Investments

The Council has continued with local projects and after some delays the café at Needham Lakes opened in 2022 and the solar car port at Stowmarket Leisure Centre came into use.

Work continue on Gateway 14 and a first contract was signed with The Range for the company to move to the site. Discussions continue with other potential companies to be located here.

In Stowmarket, investment for a new Sports, Health, Education and Leisure facility was agree and also funding to develop a new site for a depot for Mid Suffolk and Babergh districts.

Mid Suffolk District Council continues to hold investments in commercial property, outside the district, via its company CIFCO. This property, all outside of the Mid Suffolk area, ranges from gyms to car showrooms, in places including Epsom, Harlow, Lincoln, Peterborough, Norwich and Milton Keynes. Approximately £1-1.5 million is earned each year via rents however the overall value of this property portfolio has fallen.

- Economy

The Council continues to support the development of Gateway 14 which is now part of Freeport East. The Council is investing in an “innovation hub” specifically to support businesses in the Mid Suffolk area.

A new partnership with the University of Essex was set up to provide innovation opportunities for businesses.

The Women's Cycle Tour was calculated to have brought about £1 million of economic benefits to the region. There is unlikely to be a Women's Tour in 2023 due to a lack of funding nationally.

- Climate Change

The Council invested in new environmentally-friendly bin lorries – 22 out of a fleet of 35 across Babergh and Mid Suffolk. They are fuelled by HVO (Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil) produced from waste cooking oil and will reduce the carbon footprint of this service by 90%.

There was continued support for parishes with advice from the new post of biodiversity manager.

The Council encourages local groups to improve areas for wildlife and continues with the Tree for Life scheme as well as tree-planting across the district.

- Cost of living

In conjunction with the County Council, Mid Suffolk provided a number of initiatives to help with the cost of living crisis. This included an increase in the amount of funding available for those in hardship, community funding for "warm rooms" and a change to council tax for those on very low incomes.

A team at the Council worked to encourage groups and individuals to apply for funding.

- Planning and Housing

For most of the year, the Council's planning policy team continued to work on the Joint Local Plan following the Plan having been split into two parts as agreed with the Planning Inspectors last year. Part 1 covers all the social, environmental and economic policies and Part 2 covers those relating to housing numbers, distribution etc. Part 1 was progressed and is currently out at consultation. It is expected that, if agreed, this might be adopted in late summer / early autumn of 2023.

With regards to Part 2, the Inspector had acknowledged that 90% of Mid Suffolk's housing target is already allocated (either via existing permissions or sites allocated via Neighbourhood Plans) and that this is central to future policies. It is expected that work will commence on this during 2023 but that full adoption of a Part 2 would not take place until 2025.

Mid Suffolk's annual monitoring report showed that 862 new dwellings were built in the district in 2020/21 - 168% of the current annual target (513 dwellings) set by the national standard methodology. There are 7,929 outstanding planning permissions (as at 01/04/22) which are either not started or under construction. Separately, it was confirmed that Mid Suffolk now has 10.88 years of housing land supply, well above the Government target of five years.

Over £2 million was provided to parish and town councils in the form of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

A number of significant planning applications and housing developments have progressed during the year:

- Building on the Linden Homes development west of Thorney Green Road continued and a number of concerns were taken up with the developers.
 - Discussions on the application for 18 homes on the Landex development opposite the church continued but the application has not yet been decided. The application for 14 homes, beyond this site, was refused by Mid Suffolk.
 - The work on Bloor Homes Phase 3 development continued and the majority of the concerns related to the proposal from the developer to create a temporary works access on to Gipping Road. This request was withdrawn after meetings between your District Councillors and Planning Officers. It has also been finally agreed that MSDC would construct the footpath link from the Bloor site to Trinity Walk – after much pressure from your District Councillors.
 - A planning application has recently been submitted for a new factory, car park and parkland on land to the south of Rendall Lane. The application is unlikely to be determined before June 2023, at the earliest.
 - Following a site meeting last year with the MSDC Chief Executive to discuss general planning issues, there are still concerns that Mid Suffolk's planning liaison with the Parish Council needs to improve.
 - There was no further action with regards to Taylor Wimpey developing land south of Stowmarket Road and this is believed to be on hold, partly due to the status of the Joint Local Plan and the amount of housing supply Mid Suffolk now has.
- Supporting the community

We support local events and community groups where we can particularly link local groups with external fundraising via the Mid Suffolk community team. Almost £400,000 was allocated by Mid Suffolk District Council to communities across the district.

We have supported many groups with the locality fund from Mid Suffolk which for this year was a total of £7,350 for each Councillor for the Haughley, Stowupland & Wetherden Ward. The following organisations and projects in Stowupland gained support:

- Coronation celebrations
- Telstar
- Falcons Football Club
- Preschool
- Tables for the URC

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

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