

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Annual Report (2021/22)
For the Great Bricett Annual Parish Meeting on Tuesday 10 May 2022

Governance

- 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

- Council tax freeze – Council tax is to remain at the same rate so annual Mid Suffolk proportion of the council tax bill for a Band D property be £171.59.

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 224 trees and 2,645 hedgerow plants have been delivered to parishes.
- The Council adopted the Net Carbon Zero Toolkit as technical guidance for developers and homeowners to help reduce the carbon footprint in new and existing dwellings.
- Barking Tye Common – There are ongoing efforts to establish the Tye as a County Wildlife Site that would offer non-statutory protection and recognition of its value to biodiversity. In April and June of 2021 I organised two citizen-led surveys to record flora and insect species present on the site. This was intended to support data from a Suffolk Wildlife Trust survey funded from my locality budget.
- Great Bricett Community Woodland – I was very pleased that our officers at MSDC were able to provide 20 large trees and that the locality budget was used for the creation of the pond.
- MSDC owned land in St Mary's Close in Offton was proposed as a site for wildflower planting. I carried out a public consultation but did not receive enough positive support for the project to go ahead. In August last year we worked with residents and the parish council to come up with a new design which will go out for re-consultation this year.
- MSDC have finally acquired a 'cut and collect' mower which will be instrumental in better managing our roadside verges for wildlife. We are one of the first districts in Suffolk to do this and was one a key idea put forward in the Biodiversity Task Force group.
- In September 2021 a motion was passed pledging to reduce the impact of artificial lighting at night which is detrimental to wildlife and known to impact human health. The motion was almost unanimously accepted by the council. We are working on this with our officers from Planning and partners at SCC Highways, and it will form a major issue to be discussed at our next Task Force meeting.

Housing

- Mid Suffolk is investing in social and affordable rent housing across the district, with an additional 68 new build social and affordable rent homes in the pipeline for this year.
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have been awarded £324k to provide specialised emergency accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness.
- Council have pledged to provide support to those affected by the war and to open their arms to people displaced and affected.
- Council tenants face a proposed increase of 4.1% to their rents, to cover inflationary pressures and allow investment in improving the quality of council homes.

Planning

- Joint Local Plan issues. We are still waiting for confirmation of timings for the new process for the Joint Local Plan. At present, the Inspector has stated that, with regards to housing, the Council should revert to the current plans which include the Core Strategy (2008), the Core Strategy Focused Review (2012), the Stowmarket Area Action Plan (2013) and Haughley's Neighbourhood Plan (2019) with any decision taking into account the most recent National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2021).
- Great Bricett Red Lion – In January 2021 the pub was listed as an Asset of Community Value. The council's community's officers have worked to defend the pub against the application to convert the pub to a dwelling by disputing the claim of poor business viability.
- Great Bricett Business Park – The planning committee finally came to the decision to refuse the application for the siting of 69 mobile homes in the business park. This case had been re-scheduled numerous times over the year making the decision extensively delayed. The decision was made partly based on the concurrent application DC/21/06987 for 51 dwellings which provided a better outcome of 18 affordable homes.
- Pound Hill, Great Bricett – I actively supported the planning application for 4 dwellings on Pound Hill after it was endorsed by the parish council for its exemplary design and sustainability aspects.
- The 'barn' on the site opposite the brambles received planning permission to be converted into a dwelling.

Wellbeing

- A number of initiatives across the district took place during the year including Family Park Cooking session in Stowmarket, free Christmas Holiday activity session, 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 the development of Gateway 14 which is now part of Freeport East. The business case has now been agreed by Cabinet.
- The construction of a solar carport is well underway at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and the new visitor centre at Needham Lake is due to be opened this summer.
- The Local Energy Showcase in October 2021 provided an opportunity for community leaders to meet representatives of the organisations supporting renewables projects for parishes and small and medium sized enterprises.

Communities

CIL funds were used to fund a sewage treatment works for Ringshall village hall. The Ringshall village hall management committee are currently applying for CIL funds for a new playground facility in the village.

I was pleased to be able to allocate my locality budget to community groups in my ward. Projects included:

- Great Bricett Parish Council to help fund the creation of a new wildlife pond at the Great Bricett community woodland site
- Ringshall Parish Council to help fund additional signage and a dog litter bin to be used on the Holly Road/Offton Road quiet lane scheme
- Batisford Parish Council to help fund two new parish noticeboards for Batisford Parish Council
- Offton and Willisham Parish Council to fund a new public bench for Tye Lane in Willisham
- Orchard Barn CIC to help fund volunteer first aid training and a natural building materials
- Gipping Valley Trust to help fund a disability-friendly access path to the footbridge bridge on the Gipping in Baylham.

The next tranche of locality funding will be starting in the next couple of weeks, and I welcome applications from any community group, in particular any who have not benefitted previously.

Mid Suffolk District Council information is available via www.midsuffolk.gov.uk or by phone **0300 123 4000**

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

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