

District Cllr Report Battsford and Ringshall Ward

January 2020

Locality Grants

The deadline for applications for locality grand funding is now the end of January. Councillors need to process the applications in February.

District Council Budget and Council Tax

Members received a briefing on the draft budget for 2020/21. This draft budget will be considered by Cabinet on 13th January and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16th January; it is expected to be approved at full Council meeting on 27 February. Government have agreed that Shire Districts may increase council tax by £5 or 2%, whichever is the greater. There are no new proposals for Central Government grants to District Councils. Government proposes to phase out or replace New Homes Bonus by 2024. New Homes Bonus for 2020/21 will be £1.612M, an increase of £232k over 2019/20 but is likely to reduce (possibly by 50%) in 2021/22. Any new grant is likely to be based upon achieving higher house building targets. Baseline business rates will increase by 2%. Government propose a full business rates revaluation in 2021; a fundamental review of business rates is also likely. See appendix for further details.

Housing Revenue Account

After four years of government-enforced reductions, the council is also proposing putting up council house rents by 2.7%. This will result in an average increase of £2.19 per week increase for tenants.

Council Tax Payments

MSDC Cabinet on 6 January are to discuss an initiative to introduce new fines for Council Tax fraud. Cabinet will also consider adoption of a new protocol produced by Citizens Advice and Local Government Association for the collection of council tax arrears. This seeks to assist those falling behind with their payments in a less confrontational way.

Needham Lake Visitor Centre

Plans for a £600,000 visitor centre/cafe at Needham Lake have been approved. Planning permission was granted on 11th December and 127 Trading company are the preferred tenants. Works should begin in spring 2020, and this will be a welcome addition to East Anglia's most visited free attraction.

Neighbourhood Plans

Eye and Fressingfield are due to be adopted at the Cabinet meeting on 13th January.

Planning Enforcement

Planning Enforcement are reviewing their enforcement procedures with intention to make their investigations and responses to allegations swifter, more efficient and transparent. Council encourage the use of the online "Report It" form for any new complaints. If the relevant questions are completed, then the support team can create a case without any delay.

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Appendix – Factors considered in preparing the draft budget for 2020/21

- A recent increase in the Public Works Loans Board interest rate;
- There is £5.8M in Suffolk Pooled Business Rates Fund;
- £280k remains unallocated from the Mid Suffolk Business Rates pilot;
- MSDC is holding CIL of £8.5M;
- Mid Suffolk Growth and Efficiency Fund has £3m unallocated;
- The effect of the Provisional Settlement from Government is £213k better than previously assumed;
- £500,000 is being allocated for measures to mitigate climate change;
- The net revenue budget is proposed to be £10M and the Capital Programme £12M, the latter includes a proposed further investment of £8.7M in commercial properties;
- It is proposed that there will be a Council Tax increase of 1.66%, this equates for a Band D property to £2.76 pa, 5p per week.