

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Annual Report (2023/24)

New administration

The result of the May 2023 elections was that the 24 elected Green Party councillors officially became the administration at Mid Suffolk. Councillor Andy Mellen, as Leader outlined our initial priorities to lead and work with other bodies to address the challenges faced by our communities: cost of living, affordable homes, local services, public transport and climate change. A Plan for the next three years was agreed which placed environmental and social responsibilities at the heart of everything the MSDC does.

Budget

- For 2023/24 the General Fund budget was for approximately £15.5 million with an expected £2.3 million surplus which will go into reserves. Funds have also had to be provided from the Housing Revenue Account for the backlog of repairs that has built up.
- For 2024/25, net expenditure on services is budgeted at £18.5 million with a 2% increase in council tax. Council home rents increased by 7% and sheltered housing service charges also increased. These increases will ensure the Council can afford the repairs and maintenance that are needed. All these increases are due to inflation, costs of energy and other cost increases.
- The Council has reserves of over £28 million at the end of the financial year plus an expected dividend from the Gateway 14 business park. Some of these surpluses will be invested in a variety of work including new footpaths and cycle paths, land for biodiversity and green spaces, regeneration of Stowmarket town centre, improved sports provision in the district and enabling community-led housing.
- Approval was also given to increasing council tax on empty homes in 2024/25 and implementing increased council tax on second homes in 2025/26.

Thriving towns and villages

- A group of Councillors have been working on issues around sustainable transport. A new rural transport grants scheme with a pot of £600,000 was set up to help provide passenger transport options across the district including villages in the Battsford and Ringshall ward.
- Approval was gained for the financing of a Green Skills and Innovation Centre on Gateway 14. This will in part act as a centre of excellence for local businesses and a training site for adults needing to update or gain new skills.
- On the Gateway 14 site, The Range is due to move into the largest building on site. Additionally, a deal with a company specialising in supplying sustainable roof products was agreed.
- In Stowmarket, the first part of the SHELF sports project was approved and work will commence this year for new pitches, an athletics track and other improvements at Chilton Fields and next to the high school.
- In conjunction with Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk provided much support to residents and businesses affected by the floods of Storm Babet and Storm Ciaran.
- The councils of Mid Suffolk and Babergh were jointly awarded 'Council of the Year' for their collaboration with different partners, working to improve services and focus on communities.

Environmental sustainability

- The Council launched the *Cosy Homes* scheme, a £2 million project to insulate homes for free. Separately a grant of nearly £1 million was received for retrofitting council homes.
- A new *Pride in your Place* grant was established to provide every parish with additional funds to improve the environment for their community.
- The Council continues to encourage local groups to improve areas for wildlife and a call for sites from landowners was made so that more trees can be planted across the district. The annual Tree for Life scheme was again a success and tree, hedging and wildflower packs for communities across the district.
- The Council published its Carbon Reduction Management Plan with a focus for this year on improving sheltered housing and further work on the leisure centres.

Planning and Housing

- In November 2023, Part 1 of the Joint Local Plan (JLP) for Mid Suffolk and Babergh was approved and adopted. The JLP sets out a planning framework to guide development in the districts over the period to 2037. The JLP Part 1 provides a set of strategic and local development management policies against which planning applications and appeals will be assessed. There are 10 strategic policies (such as on affordable housing, climate change and tourism) and 32 local policies (such as on biodiversity, the historic environment, and sustainable construction).
- The Council is continuing to work on Part 2 as well as publishing Supplementary Planning Documents to support the JLP. The first three, currently at draft stage, are the Housing SPD, Biodiversity and Trees SPD and the Intensive Livestock and Poultry SPD.
- Over £1.5 million was provided to parish and town councils in the form of the Community Infrastructure Levy during the year.
- Within our ward, a proposal for 20 new light and general industrial buildings and office units in Charles Tye, Ringshall, was recently refused by planning committee on the basis of the rural location of the site and poor transport links.

Supporting the community

- Almost £550,000 was allocated by Mid Suffolk District Council Direct to communities across the district from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
- Battsford Village Hall benefited from the Capital Grant and S106 funding from our Communities Team, funding new insulation scheme that will reduce carbon emissions by 1.8 tonnes CO₂e per year.
- I supported the following projects in Battsford and Ringshall ward from my Locality Budget 2023-24:
 - Battsford Village Hall – funding towards insulation upgrades
 - Great Bricett Parish Council – safety lighting for telephone box and defibrillator
 - Offton and Willisham Village Hall – funding for replacement of fire doors
 - Battsford Punchbowl CIC – funding for new garden fence
 - Suffolk Wildlife Action Group – funding for new mapping and wildlife tracking equipment

- Orchard Barn CIC – funding towards fitting new external doors in new education building

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

The end of term report can be found here: <https://bmsdhosting.net/End-of-Term-Report/Mid-Suffolk-District-Council-2019-2022/>

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

Dr Dan Pratt

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Mid Suffolk District Council

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