

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Annual Report (2023/24) For Annual Parish Meetings in May 2024

- **New administration**

The result of the May 2023 elections was that the 24 elected Green Party councillors became the official administration at Mid Suffolk. Having been leader of the opposition prior to the election, I was elected to lead the council for the next four year. I 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.

Over the next few months A Plan for Mid Suffolk, covering the next few years was agreed which placed environmental and social responsibilities at the heart of everything the Council 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. This has been done to 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 as at the end of the financial year plus an expected dividend from the Gateway 14 business park. Plans for this are on a variety of work including new foot/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 has 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.

Approval was gained for the financing of a Green Skills and Innovation Centre on Gateway 14 (G14). This will in part act as a centre of excellence for local businesses and a training site for adults needing new skills. Also on G14, retailer The Range has moved into the largest building on site, and a deal with a sustainable roof products supplier has been agreed.

In Stowmarket, the first part of the 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. 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, 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 on Housing, Biodiversity and Intensive Livestock and Poultry.

Over £1.5 million was provided to parish and town councils in the form of the Community Infrastructure Levy during the year.

- **Supporting the community**

We support local events and community groups where we can and particularly link local groups with external fundraising via the Mid Suffolk community team. Almost £550,000 was allocated by Mid Suffolk District Council Direct to communities across the district from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

I supported the following projects in Bacton ward from my Locality Budget 2023-24:

- Friends of Bacton Primary School towards the purchase of new buddy benches and litter bins
- Bacton Fayre
- Cotton Village Hall towards the purchase of a new kitchen equipment
- Bacton Bowls Club, towards the purchase of a new electric mower
- Wyverstone village hall for the kitchen extension
- Westhorpe Parish Council for purchase of a solar panel for their SID device

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

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

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

Andrew Mellen

Mid Suffolk District Councillor – Bacton Ward

Leader of the Council and cabinet member for performance and resilience

Email: andrew.mellen@midsuffolk.gov.uk