

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Annual Report (2019/20)
For the Elmswell Annual Parish Meeting on Monday 18 May 2020

Due to the Covid 19 emergency, as at 23 March 2020, all Council meetings were cancelled and Council staff began working from home where possible.

- Governance

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England Review came into effect in May 2019 with the local elections. The number of councillors at Mid Suffolk District Council was reduced from 40 to 34 and all the ward boundaries were changed. Elmswell now forms part of the new Elmswell and Woolpit Ward which is represented by 2 district councillors. At the elections on 2 May 2019, Sarah Mansel and Helen Geake, both of the Green Party, were elected to be the representatives for the ward of Elmswell and Woolpit.

The election result was 16 Conservative Councillors, 12 Green, 5 Liberal Democrat and 1 Independent. As the largest party the Conservatives formed an Administration. The Independent Councillor joined them. The Liberal Democrats agreed to work with the Green Party on an informal basis. Overall this means the Council is split 50/50 with no overall control and each vote needing the casting vote of the Chair if the Greens and Liberal Democrats are not in agreement with the particular vote.

- Budget and investments

The 2020/21 budget was approved for approximately £10 million on core services (as in previous years) with a council tax increase of 1.66% (against the previous year's increase of 0.5%). Additionally, council home rents increased by 2.7% and sheltered housing by £2 per week.

Our group put forward budget proposals including a sustainable house-building programme, ensuring all homes are fully insulated, installing EV points in local towns, providing a sustainable design service and a competition to design a Suffolk house that meets 21st century needs of low carbon and high energy efficiency.

The Council is on track for an underspend against budget of £879,000 for the financial year 2019/20. There is an accumulated £9.25 million in a reserve known as the "Growth and Efficiency Fund" – in addition to standard reserves such as for maintenance and planning. Some of this funding is expected to be spent on projects such as the refurbishment of the Regal Cinema in Stowmarket but a significant amount remains unallocated.

Mid Suffolk District Council increased its borrowing authorisation from £25 million to £50 million to invest in commercial property, outside of the Mid Suffolk area, in order to earn income. Properties ranging from gyms to car showrooms, are owned in Epsom, Harlow, Lincoln, Peterborough, Norwich and Milton Keynes.

- Climate Change

In July 2019 the Council announced a Climate Emergency and agreed to set up a Task Force to recommend appropriate actions. To date the Task Force has not provided any recommendations and it is expected to report back in July 2020. Initial work on establishing the Council's emissions data has been undertaken by Groundwork.

£500,000 from the current year's budget has been committed towards Climate Change initiatives.

- Council Strategies

The Council developed a new Corporate Plan to incorporate all strategies – economy, environment, housing, wellbeing and communities – in a new vision of "great communities with bright and healthy futures that everyone is proud to call home". The Council's mission was proposed as being to "provide strong, proud and inspirational leadership; striving for excellence and together building great communities for everyone to live, work, visit and invest in." and a set of Corporate Plan Outputs was agreed that meets this.

Outputs include projects such as improvements to the Leisure Centre in Stowmarket, development of the NatWest building in Stowmarket, a new café at Needham Lakes, 50 new council homes, expansion of the Trees for Life scheme and a review of Community Transport.

New strategies to be developed include ones for tourism, local business and heritage.

- Planning and Housing

The Council continued to work on the Joint Local Plan with further consultation taking place over summer 2019. In September 2019 the Council confirmed that it had 5.66 years of housing land supply. Nationally, the National Planning Policy Framework was revised in February 2019 and this became one of the core documents against which planning decisions were made particularly in relation to housing where Mid Suffolk's existing policies were more than five years old.

Many communities developed Neighbourhood Plans which then became part of the Development Plan as the most up to date planning document. Locally Haughley, Thurston and Stowupland all now have valid Neighbourhood Plans.

During 2019/20 there were several major planning applications. Reserved matters for 60 homes east of Borley Crescent and outline planning permission for up to 9 homes at Oak Lane have both been approved. The reserved matters application for 106 homes adjacent to Whitehouse Farm and the outline permission for 105 homes on School Road have yet to be determined. Outline planning permission for up to 65 homes to the west of the former Bacon Factory was refused, but more recently this application has been re-submitted and gone to appeal.

- Supporting the community

We support local events and community groups where we can particularly linking local groups with external fundraising via the Mid Suffolk community team.

We have supported many groups with the locality fund from Mid Suffolk which for this year was a total of £7,350 for each. In particular the following organisations in Elmswell gained support:

- Elmswild – to purchase seeds and trees to be planted around the village.
- Companions – to finance two outings with lunch.
- St John's Church – to help finance a defibrillator.
- Elmswell Library Friends – to provide new tables and chairs.
- Elmswell Amenities Association – to support the Wesley project.

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

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

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