

**Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Annual Report (2020/21)
For the Elmswell Annual Parish Council Meeting on Monday 17 May 2021**

- Governance

Due to the Covid 19 emergency, there were no Council meetings from 23 March 2020 until the new Government legislation to allow virtual meetings was approved in May. Council staff have been working from home where possible and all Council and committee meetings are currently being conducted virtually using the Teams platform.

The Annual Council meeting was deferred until September. The Green Party councillors formed a political group with the Liberal Democrat councillors, so we now form 50% of the total number of councillors. The chair of the Council is from the Conservative and Independent group.

- Budget and investments

The COVID pandemic is continuing to have a financial impact on the Council's budget. There are already losses of approximately £1M with projected losses of a further £1M during 2021/22. The Government has provided support but not sufficient to cover all the losses.

Despite having about £10M in reserves the Council increased Council Tax by 1.66%. It has been agreed that £4M of the reserves are to be allocated to the following departments Communities, Housing, Economy and Well-being.

The new rules about PWLB loans for the 'invest to save' scheme, have not halted the current round of acquisitions, but in future the Council will have to fund such activities in other ways.

- Climate Change and Biodiversity

The Climate Change working group made a number of proposals to Council, including projects such as Solar Carport at the Mid Suffolk Leisure centre site. Work is also underway at the leisure centres to reduce the carbon footprint. The waste fleet are to be converted to use biodiesel fuel. There is to be a biodiversity mapping project across the district and the public realm team to are hoping to work with parish councils to promote more tree and hedgerow planting.

- Housing

Council housing rents are set to increase by CPI+1%, which is on average £1.25 increase per week. Garage rents are to remain the same. Sheltered housing service charges are to increase by £1 per week, and sheltered housing are to remain the same as last year. In principle 'right-to-buy' receipts are to be retained for use to develop and acquire new council dwellings.

There is a programme of decarbonising Council dwellings. This year (20/21) 62 Air Source Heat pumps, 169 boilers have been installed in Council properties and there are a further 200 planned boiler installations over next year at a cost of £1.8m. A pilot project in Harleston in underway to test various schemes to find out the most suitable approach for our housing stock.

- Planning

The Regulation 19 Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan was agreed by both Councils and is now awaiting a response from the Planning Inspectorate. It is hoped that this will be able to proceed to adoption this year. Development in the village has continued apace throughout the pandemic. Construction commenced on the Crest Nicholson site on Wetherden Road and many homes are now occupied. Amendments to the original application were made to increase the number of dwellings and reduce the size of others. Construction has also recently begun on both the 106 dwellings on Ashfield Road and the 60 dwellings at Borley Crescent. Now that the first phase of 190 dwellings at the Bacon Factory is close to completion an outline application was made for a further 65 houses to the west. This was eventually granted in January 2021. Further small scale developments have been approved east of White House Barns and along Grove Lane. The application for 9 dwellings at the end of Oak Lane was amended to a smaller area to avoid providing any affordable homes.

- Supporting the community

Many community groups have struggled during the pandemic, but we were pleased to support the following organisations in Elmswell with our locality budget this year.

- Elmswell Girl Guiding
- Elmswell Scout Group
- Elmswell History Group
- Elmswild
- Elmswell Parish Council

Community grants of over £150k have been awarded to community projects throughout the district as well as £100k specifically targeted at COVID related support groups.

Due to the COVID pandemic MSDC officers are working with SCC officers and Woolpit Health Centre to bring forward the construction of the car park on the Old Stowmarket Road development in Woolpit in order to assist with the roll out of the COVID vaccination programme. An application for CIL funding is due to be made for this 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.

Sarah Mansel

Mid Suffolk District Councillor – Elmswell and Woolpit Ward

Email: sarah.mansel@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Phone: 07860 829517

Helen Geake

Mid Suffolk District Councillor – Elmswell and Woolpit Ward

Email: helen.geake@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Phone: 07548 154300