

**Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Annual Report (2021/22)
For the Elmswell Annual Parish Council Meeting on Monday 16th May 2022**

- Governance

The Green party had a very successful result a by-election in the Thurston Ward, so the Council remains hung. Many decisions are being decided on the Chairman's vote and there has been little collaborative working between the administration group and the Green and Liberal Democrat group.

Council meetings are now being held in person, but virtual platforms continue to be used for briefings and internal meetings. It is hoped that the Council will in future be able to hold 'hybrid' meetings where voting Council members need to be physically present at meetings, but some officers and members of the public will be able to make presentations and representations online.

- Budget and investments

Mid Suffolk's general fund budget continues to be in a healthy condition, and next year's council tax will be frozen. The council agreed the proposal from the Green and Liberal Democrat group to spend some of the Growth and Efficiency Fund to provide 2 electric bus services to help residents get into Stowmarket for a 2 year period. The Council's investment in CIFCO continues to provide revenue despite the value of the assets deteriorating.

- Climate Change and Biodiversity

The Council has recently adopted the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure plan to encourage more residents to travel sustainably in the district.

As part of the Tree and Hedgerow planting scheme over 200 trees and c2,500 hedgerow plants have been delivered to parishes. Over 250 trees were given to celebrate births during 2021 as part of the 'Tree for Life' scheme.

The construction of a solar carport is well underway at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and the new visitor centre at Needham Lake will be opened this summer.

The waste tankers are now all operating on hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) which should cut carbon emissions by 90%.

MSDC adopted a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit as technical guidance for both developers and homeowners to help reduce the carbon footprint in new and existing buildings.

- Housing

The Housing Revenue budget was agreed by full Council, and as the Government have now lifted the rent cap, Council tenants will see a 4.1% increase in their rent. The HRA business plan is to be developed and hopes to include a programme of improvements to existing Council stock as well as building and acquiring dwellings.

Part of the housing development on the old HQ site in Needham Market has been completed and this included 3 new council homes, and a further 15 affordable homes were acquired across the district in 2021. Over 100 residents were prevented from becoming homeless and the Council provided 16 dedicated beds for Rough Sleepers courtesy of grant funding. After some difficulties at Thedwastre Close in Elmswell, the units there are now being used for temporary accommodation to help people move on to taking on tenancies.

As part of the response to the Ukraine crisis, MSDC officers will be carrying out housing checks on the properties which will be offered to Ukrainian refugees, once the applications have been processed by the Home Office.

- Planning

Following the inspector's report on the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local plan, the Councils have decided to proceed with a 2-part local plan. This will enable the important social, economic and environmental objectives to be published in a Part 1 Joint Local Plan which will be adopted first, whilst the remaining work on spatial strategy matters and housing allocations will be addressed in a Part 2 Joint Local Plan. MSDC currently has over 9 years housing land supply.

Locally the reserved matters planning applications for small developments on Ashfield Road and Grove Lane have been granted, along with many householder applications for extensions and garages etc. Outline permission for 86 dwellings on School Road was granted along with conditions relating to highway improvements on School Road and at the junction with Church Road. This site has now been transferred to Bloor Homes who have now submitted a reserved matters application and there are ongoing discussions about the highway improvements. We are still awaiting decisions on the applications for 19 houses on the corner of Ashfield Road and Grove Lane and the fuel station and drive-thru restaurants on the A1088 roundabout. Slightly further afield the reserved matters application for 300 homes north of Bury Road in Woolpit was granted in January, but we still await any decision on whether the County Council will be building a new school there.

- Wellbeing

The council adopted its first Wellbeing Strategy this year. A number of initiatives across the district took place during the year including Family Park Cooking session in Stowmarket, free Christmas Holiday activity session, Our Parks (free outdoor fitness sessions) in Stowmarket and the Active Schools programme. Mid Suffolk District Council together with Suffolk County Council and Stowmarket Town Council supported the launch in July of the Chilton Fields parkrun held every Saturday morning.

- Economy

The Council continues to support the development of Gateway 14 which is now part of Freeport East. The business case has now been agreed by Cabinet. Almost 200 young people attended the Careeriosity event focussing on STEM and cultural industries. The Council held it's first Local Energy Showcase which attracted over 200 visitors and several local businesses. BMSDC's Virtual High Street project won a Gold IESE award.

- Communities

Almost £400,00 worth of grants were distributed to support the communities across the district. MSDC acquired the land for the new Woolpit Health Centre car park ahead of planned schedule. We were pleased to be able to allocate all of our locality budget to community groups in both villages. The Elmswell based projects included:

- Elmswell Football Club for white lining equipment
- Wesley Ukelele Group for some PA equipment
- Elmswell Library Friends for a digital projector
- Elmswell PC for COVID safe improvements to both Wesley and Blackbourne meeting rooms.

The next tranche of locality funding will be starting in the next couple of weeks and we welcome applications from any community group, in particular any who have not benefitted previously.

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