

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Report – January 2023

Solar PV Investment at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre, Stowmarket

In late December, the council finished building solar carports at the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in Stowmarket. We are among the UK's first rural local authorities to trial the technology, including battery storage, which will reduce the centre's reliance on the grid. The 70 solar carports should provide up to 24% of the centre's annual electricity demand. The work was match funded by an award from the New Anglia LEP. This follows the installation, earlier in 2022 of an extensive array of solar PV panels on the leisure centre roof. Together, the solar carports and roof solar panels will now produce nearly 50% of Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre's annual electricity consumption.

New Bin Lorries named and put into service

Mid Suffolk, with Babergh, have now taken delivery of 22 brand new environmentally friendly bin lorries. This marks the councils' biggest upgrade to our 35-strong waste fleet in almost 10 years. These, like our previous lorries will be fuelled by certified sustainable Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) produced from waste cooking oil. As we advised in our previous report, a competition was held where residents were invited to submit names for these new lorries. 400 suggestions were submitted and the councils' crews and waste team then picked their favourite 22 names. Names such as Chitty Chitty Bin Bin, Gary Bineker, Binderella, and Ed Sheerbin now adorn our new fleet, so look out for these new waste freighters collecting in your road. This major investment will improve vehicle reliability issues and hence collection timings.

Fees & Charges for 2023/24 agreed

Cabinet, at its January meeting, agreed the schedule of Fees & Charges for the year 2023/24 which will be built into the budget for the coming year. Fees and charges are an important source of income to the Council and in the forthcoming year are anticipated to generate income of £5.407million. As a council we must tread a fine line between cost recovery and any affordability issues that could lead to potential fall off of income from customer price resistance. Five areas account for 80% of our fees and charges income, those being Development Management at £1.58million, Garden Waste at £1.19million, Car Park income at £581k, Trade Waste at £576k and Building Regulations Chargeable Services at £373k.

Tree planting and new spine road at Gateway 14

The first tree, out of a programme of over 15,500 trees, 2.2km of native hedgerow, bund screening and a large wildflower meadow, was planted on the Gateway 14 site in December 2022. Site landscaping is a priority for the council to support biodiversity and create a high-quality environment and green corridors.

The new spine road giving access onto the site from the 'Tesco roundabout' and providing through access to replace the closed-up section of Mill Lane should open at the beginning of February.

Council Tenancy Policy adopted

A new Tenancy Policy for tenants of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils was agreed by Cabinet at its January meeting. The joint policy ensures that both councils comply with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Tenancy Standard, current legislation and best practice. There are no significant changes to our current practice of tenancy management, or the rights of existing or new tenants proposed in the new policy which will continue to provide long-term security of tenure.

New Scrutiny/Cabinet protocol

At the January Cabinet meeting a new Scrutiny/Cabinet Protocol for Overview and Scrutiny was agreed. This may just seem like an internal procedural matter, but in a model of Cabinet governance it is important that this oversight process is clearly defined to promote a culture of accountability, openness and transparency. Monthly meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee are held in public and livestreamed and based around a robust work programme aligned to the work programme of Cabinet and Full Council.

Town & Parish Liaison Meeting

Mid Suffolk and Babergh are reinstating their regular meetings with town and parish councils with invitations being issued via clerks. The next session, for Mid Suffolk, will be held at The Mix, 127 Ipswich Street, Stowmarket on Tuesday 7th February at 1.30pm. It will last for two hours and will cover the budget setting, an update on progress with The Joint Local Plan and plans for the 2023 elections. The meeting will also introduce our new localities officers and explain their approach. The district council is also keen to hear about town and parish plans for local Coronation celebrations.

More details on our website

These reports can only ever be a very brief update and both parish councillors and residents are encouraged to visit our council website for regular news announcements and to obtain more details. The council also regularly uses social media to reach and inform residents.

Tim Passmore & John Whitehead

(contact details are on parish noticeboards and on the MSDC's website but please note that Cllr Whitehead's have changed effective 3rd November 2022)