

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Report – March 2023

The People & Place Plan pilot scheme

Babergh and Mid Suffolk are among only six authorities across the country to be part of a Government-funded pilot, aiming to get more communities shaping the places where they live with a new approach to planning. Through the pilot, community groups will be helped to develop People and Place plans which are simpler and more accessible ways for residents to highlight their local planning priorities.

These Plans are being proposed as lighter alternatives to developing full Neighbourhood Plans. The BMSDC team behind the pilot will work with communities to help identify which buildings, areas and characteristics are important to them and they will deliver bespoke workshops and toolkits to help assemble the plans. Please give some serious consideration to getting involved with this initiative.

Town & Parish Liaison Meeting

The revived Town & Parish Liaison Meeting was held in Stowmarket last month and among items covered were the council's budget for 2023/24, possible plans to consolidate our three aging operational sites into a shared £12million new depot, a first look at our new culture, heritage and visitor economy strategy, more cost-of-living support, work to tackle rough sleeping and support available for our towns and parishes ahead of the May local elections.

Mid Suffolk's 2023/24 General Fund Budget

After a great deal of oversight, scrutiny and briefings, the General Fund budget for 23/24 was presented to Full Council on the evening of 23rd February. Despite the council being finely-balanced 50/50 between the administration and the opposition, the budget was unanimously approved by Full Council for a second year in succession. With both healthy reserves and forecasted surpluses over the four-year outlook to 2026/27, the administration was able to accept an opposition amendment to set aside £2million for household energy-saving measures. For a second year running, the budget froze the Mid Suffolk council tax precept. In fact over the last seven years, the Mid Suffolk precept has only increased by 8% despite RPI inflation over that timeframe being close to 35%. For every £1 that residents pay over to Mid Suffolk District Council on their council tax bill, the council only retains 9p in the pound for its own precept, with the vast bulk (74p in the pound) going to the County Council, 13p to the Suffolk Police and 4p, on average, going to town or parish councils.

Council house rents, which form part of a ring-fenced Housing Revenue Account, were increased by 7%. That is in line with most other local authorities as the government capped the increase at 7%, overriding the usual CPI+1% guideline increase. Many of Mid Suffolk's tenants are on housing or other benefits that the government are increasing from 1st April by 10.1% and the council's Housing Revenue Account Budget was passed with 25 votes in favour and 7 votes against.

New Joint Depot proposals at an early stage

Babergh and Mid Suffolk current operate out of three aging operational sites for the waste and public realm teams. The councils are now exploring plans to consolidate the three sites into one large new, centrally located site. Mid Suffolk's February Full Council meeting (and Babergh's) approved the capital needed to move this project forward and a detailed business plan will now be drawn up whilst a suitable site is identified for purchase. The likely cost of the new joint facility is in the order of £12million although that could be offset in part, in due course, from the sale proceeds of the existing three sites.

May Elections and Voter ID

The UK Government has introduced a requirement for voters to show photo ID when voting at a polling station. The first time this will apply is at the local district, town and parish elections in May 2023. The Electoral Commission will have a national awareness campaign and Mid Suffolk elections' team will play their part but parish councils can also help in spreading the message regarding Voter ID to residents.

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)