

January 2020

District Councillor's Report: Harry Richardson

I hope this report finds you well and that you have all had a very enjoyable Christmas and New Year. In the absence of any full Council meeting between this report and my previous one, I have provided an update on some wider matters that may be of interest to you.

National Planning Policy

Following last month's general election there are a number of policy changes identified in the Conservative Party's manifesto that have the potential to change the way that MSDC considers planning applications and I thought it prescient to bring these to your attention:

“Infrastructure first: We will amend planning rules so that the infrastructure – roads, schools, GP surgeries – comes before people move into new homes. And our new £10 billion Single Housing Infrastructure Fund will help deliver it faster.

Beautiful, high-quality homes: We will ask every community to decide on its own design standards for new development, allowing residents a greater say on the style and design of development in their area, with local councils encouraged to build more beautiful architecture.

Environmentally friendly homes: We will support the creation of new kinds of homes that have low energy bills and which support our environmental targets and will expect all new streets to be lined with trees.”¹

I would urge a strong degree of caution in treating these as firm commitments, however. As far as I am aware there have not been any White Papers or policy papers produced in support of them. As a result, these initiatives may be subject to change, delay etc. but they would have a significant – and, in my view, positive – impact on local planning rules if implemented in full.

MSDC Budget 2020/21

The first draft of Mid Suffolk District Council's budget for 2020/21 is set to be considered by councillors later this month, including a 1.66% increase in its share of council tax, adding £2.76 a year to the bill of a Band D Property.²

The budget will be considered by Mid Suffolk cabinet members on Monday 13th January and by Overview and Scrutiny on Thursday 16th January. It will then go to Full Council in February and, if approved, will come into effect on 1st April.

¹ 'The Conservative Party Manifesto', p. 31 (2019). [Source: https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf]

² This is significantly below both the growth in average earnings (3.6%) and inflation (1.8%) in the year to September 2019 [Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-50388220>]

This will include:

- A proposed increase of 1.66% to council tax, equivalent to just £2.76 over the course of a year for a Band D property (increases range from £1.84 per annum for the smallest Band A property to £5.54 for the largest Band H property).
- No change in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme that sees poorest residents pay just 5% of their bill.
- A change to empty property discount, reducing the period that unoccupied and unfurnished properties pay discounted council tax from three months to 28 days, in order to bring empty properties in the district back into use.
- Continued investment in CIFCO – the council’s property investment company, as agreed in last year’s budget. CIFCO currently contributes over £1.4m a year in income to Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and makes a significant contribution to the money required to run the councils’ services. Without this income, residents would face the choice of either a substantial hike in council tax bills to fund the shortfall or cuts to services.
- A reserve of £500,000 set aside for 2020/21 to tackle climate change.

The increases are in the face of reduced Government finance and changing funding landscape, with local councils increasingly incentivised to deliver local economic and housing growth – making both essential to the financial future of the council.

The budget report also recognises the cumulative savings/income of £30.9m achieved by the Council since 2011/12, through shared services, efficiencies, better use of technology and commercial opportunities – with a further £2.7m in savings/income identified for 2020/21 and beyond.

Councillors are also considering the introduction of penalties to tackle council tax fraud, alongside the adoption of a new protocol produced by Citizens Advice and Local Government Association for the collection of council tax arrears, in order to help those in genuine need.

In the meantime, residents can easily check their details and let the councils know of any changes 24/7 by signing up for an online account via the councils’ website. Through an online account, residents can opt for paperless billing, check their balance, see instalments, update their details and see council tax reduction and housing benefit claim information as well as viewing bills online.

Across the District more broadly there have been a number of new announcements in recent weeks and I have included summary of these updates below:

Next phase in development of Needham Lake visitor centre and café

Plans for a £600,000 visitor centre/cafe at Needham Lake have been approved and a local operator selected to run it – supporting local youth work and boosting tourism to the town.

1000 Endangered Animals

Over Christmas the Suffolk Waste Partnership's celebration of recycling took on a theme of endangered animals.

The artwork created by schools across Suffolk will be on display at Ipswich Town Hall café Gallery until 11 Jan, and The Apex , Bury St Edmunds until March 2020.

791k funding boost for communities

Communities across Babergh and Mid Suffolk received a funding boost totalling £791,000, for local projects including a new car park and bus shelter.

New recycling wrap-up

The festive and New Year period are always a great time to encourage residents to think about reducing waste and improving their recycling knowledge and this year Suffolk Recycling launched a new Christmas Wrap-Up.

The guide has tips on how to reduce waste and improve recycling habits over Christmas, all in one place – including information on what to do with old fairy lights, wrapping paper, baubles, trees, food, metals and more. You can find the full guide on MSDC's website.

Suffolk's Recycling Centres also offer free 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle - not a Waste of time!' sessions to interested parties to learn more about ways to reduce waste and recycling. This will help to provide an alternative way to access information about recycling which is also available on the Suffolk Recycling website.

I hope that this report has been useful but if a member of the Parish Council wishes to discuss any of the above further then please do not hesitate to contact me via the email address below.

With kind regards,



Cllr Harry Richardson JP

Mid Suffolk District Councillor for Thurston Ward

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