

29 April 2022

## **District Councillor's Annual Report Walsham Le Willows Ward**

1. As we emerged from the pandemic Mid Suffolk District Council, unlike many councils, was in a strong financial position which allowed it in 21 /22 to:

- a. Maintain all services at, or above pre Covid levels,
- b. Invest an additional £5m from reserves to support the recovery
- c. Freeze council tax.

2. The Council's strong financial position (£3.4m surplus in Fy 21/22) is in part due to:

- a. The strong performance of the property investments made by the Council via CIFCO which is delivering healthy positive returns which this financial year will be in the order of £1.6m. The portfolio has also experienced very strong capital growth over the last 12 months.
- b. The decision to relocate to Endeavour House and the resulting savings made. This move has also resulted in the Council being able to attract high quality staff as the joint roles with Babergh offer significantly bigger roles operating out of a state-of-the-art building

3. In addition, the lessons learnt during the Pandemic around flexible / home working have also been embraced, resulting in reduced workspace requirements, further financial savings and a more agile workforce.

4. Throughout the year the Council has continued to deliver against its strategic priorities and a few highlights of the work done are listed below:

a. Communities and Wellbeing

- i. £500,000 of community grants have been awarded by MSDC this year.
- ii. A further £96,300 was allocated as Community Restart funding post covid
- iii. Many projects have been delivered by the Council to improve health and wellbeing during the year, a good example being the continuation and expansion of development of Holiday Activity and Food Programme across all holidays including half terms.
- iv. Looking forward, the Council is developing a plan on how best to respond to the cost-of-living crisis, ensuring that available support gets to those who need it, as early as possible.
- v. On a smaller scale, my small locality budget was fully utilised in 21/22 and I was able to support organisations across the ward. The 22/23 budget is now "open for business" please let me know if I can help.

b. Customers

Support for customers remains very important to the Council and in the first 10 months of the year the Customer Services team handled 128,000 phone calls and 13,3000 emails. In addition, 1100 customers were supported face to face at the Customer access points and 311 residents called the Council **Home But Alone** service seeking pandemic support.

c. Economy

Work has started on the Gateway 14 logistics and business park project outside Stowmarket which is set to create 4000 plus jobs and generate inward investment to the District of £250m. At the other end of the scale, over 100 new businesses have signed up to the Virtual High Street in Stowmarket. Customers are now able to visit their local shops online to browse stock, place orders and arrange click and collect or a delivery from home or on the move. The economy is currently strong and expanding.

d. Environment

MSDC has declared both climate and biodiversity emergencies. As a result, a carbon reduction management plan is now in places as well as a biodiversity management plan. These have resulted in many environmental wins over the last year, these include:

- i. Jointly with Babergh, the Council has planted 281 trees and 4690 hedgerow plants
- ii. A three-acre biodiversity green oasis has been created in Great Finborough
- iii. MSDC has become the first Council in UK to switch its fleet of vehicles to use hydrotreated vegetable oil, which has resulted in a 90% reduction in harmful emissions
- iv. Extensive carbon reduction measures are now in place in the District's leisure centres, including solar panels, air source heating and solar car ports
- v. Fly tipping is a recognised problem and one the Council takes very seriously. To this end work has begun on developing a litter and fly tipping strategy for Mid Suffolk and since April 2021 99% of all fly tipping incidents were cleared within 48 hrs

The Council's Carbon neutrality journey started in 2018 and it is currently on course to be carbon neutral, as planned, by 2030. We have made a good start, but much work remains to be done.

e. Housing

Across the District, 35% of the new houses built on most major developments are classed as affordable: that is either Shared Ownership or rented through a housing Association. During the year 108 housing specific planning applications were approved delivering 926 new homes. In addition to these private sector developments, Mid Suffolk Growth has purchased two building plots to build low cost highly sustainable Council homes, one of which is in Walsham. In addition to building new homes, the council continues to invest in its housing stock, for example:

- i. Between April 2019 and November 2021, Mid Suffolk installed 114 Air Source Heat Pumps in council owned homes
- ii. 3312 council homes in Mid Suffolk now have solar panels installed up to December 2021

5. Neighbourhood plans

A new Joint Local Plan was formally submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for independent examination on 31 March 2021. Whilst work continues, once formally adopted, this plan together with Neighbourhood plans will allow communities to have a bigger say in planning decisions that affect their area. **Larger villages need a Neighbourhood plan** and significant support is available to help deliver it. This is not something that Parish Councils can deliver alone and I would urge you to offer your services. Your Village needs you!

6. Civil Infrastructure Levey

CIL is a levy made against the majority of new build houses. The money is collected by MSDC who then forward 15% to the parishes without a Neighbourhood plan and 25% to those that have such a plan. However, the bulk of the CIL funding is held centrally to support infrastructure projects across the District. Hunston does not have new builds and as a Parish Meeting, even if it did, it would receive nothing! However, you can still access CIL funds and Community Grants of up to £15,000 are not difficult to get. So, if you have a project in mind now is the time to pursue it and please don't forget that my small Locality Budget is also there to help.

7. Walsham Le Willows Food Bank.

Walsham le Willows Food Bank is operated by Walsham le Willows Community Council as a charity, registered with the Charity Commission (no. 278321), and was set up in December 2020 at the height of the COVID19 pandemic. In their first year of operation, they delivered 58 food and hygiene parcels, which equates to 1,291.48kgs in weight, to support 144 individuals. Over the last few months demand has increased dramatically: November 226.85 kgs; December 330.13kgs; January 408.30kgs; February 535.49kg;s and March 568.52kgs. In order to meet the ever-growing demand, they urgently need to raise more funds to help cover the rapidly increasing costs of providing the service – can you help?

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