

## **Appendix C – County Cllr. Penny Otton’s Report to Full Council**

**BUDGET MEETING:** I put forward my groups amendments including more highways officers to deal with planning applications, more health visitors and social workers, change the school transport policy on split villages and siblings, put back funding for CABs, and put in electric charging points at all depots for council owner vehicles with the plan to have all electric asap.

I am sorry these were voted down.

**Ipswich Northern Route project recommended to cease:** The Leader of Suffolk County Council has announced that he will be recommending to his Cabinet that the Ipswich Northern Route should not proceed to the next phase of development. This follows an Interim Study, a Strategic Outline Business Case, and a public consultation into the proposed bypass to the north of Ipswich. The public consultation found that 70% of respondents were against the bypass, and there has been a prominent anti-bypass campaign organised by local residents. Babergh District Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and East Suffolk District Council all withdrew their support. The Cabinet made this decision on the future of the INR project on Tuesday 25 February.

**REPORT ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT:** this has now been published and has highlighted many of the problems that the new policy has had, in particular on the way it was difficult for parents to gain information. It also showed that the time taken to implement was far too short and many of the issues we raised at the time have now been detailed. This was put to the scrutiny committee last week where I put forward the problem of split villages and siblings. I also asked when the actual policy would be scrutinised

**Phase 3 of Superfast Broadband Programme:** The Cabinet has approved the roll-out of the third phase of Suffolk’s superfast broadband programme with BT Openreach. Currently, 96% of properties in Suffolk have access to superfast broadband. Phase 3 will aim to reach a further 2% of properties, who are amongst the hardest to reach. In order to fund this, the council will reinvest the £10m of ‘gainshare funding’ that it has received from the first two contracts with BT Openreach.

**CHILDRENS CENTRE CONSULTATION:** this ended, and I have put in my groups concerns , including how any outreach system will impact on rural areas.

**SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL PLANNING MEETING - NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL:** This will be on 11th March. I have met with the clerk to make sure we are up to date with any issues. I am not convinced they are taking into account the new planning permissions and therefore increase in pupil numbers, plus highways issues.

## **Appendix D –**

### **District Cllr. Harry Richardson’s Report to Full Council**

Following on from the Council’s Cabinet meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> February, Councillors approved MSDC’s budget for 2020/21, including a 1.66% increase in its share of council tax, adding £2.76 a year to the bill of a Band D Property. This was previously reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and included a number of schemes proposed by the Green and Liberal Democrat groups on the Council.

I included a summary of the proposed Budget in my January report but for ease of reference I have reiterated these below:

- 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.

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- 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.

In addition, the Council also approved the budget for the Housing Revenue Account for 2020/21. MSDC has increased its rent for social housing by 2.7% (equating to an average of £2.19 per week), in line with government guidelines that allow rental increases of up to 1% above the rate of inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index. In addition, the Council's debt cap has been removed, which will allow Mid Suffolk to borrow to increase its supply of social housing.

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

Needham Market on track for bright future - Needham Market railway station is set to receive £380,000 in government funding to improve accessibility. The funding from the Department of Transport's new Access for All programme gives a further boost to the council's plans to regenerate the town, working in partnership with other organisations and the local community.

Helping ratepayers high on the agenda - Proposals to enable the council to provide discretionary discounts to ratepayers as quickly as possible was agreed at Mid Suffolk's cabinet meeting last month, and will be implemented as soon as the Government provides full details of the discretionary retail discount, local newspaper discount and pub discount schemes.

Ipswich Town Football Club teams up with Active Schools - Ipswich Town Football Club has joined the drive to get more youngsters active. The Club has become the first ambassador of the £80,000 three-year Active Schools project which aims to increase the number of people taking part in sport and physical activity.

Services provided at leisure centre are named as some of the country's best - Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and Stradbroke Swim and Fitness Centre have recently been named as some of the country's best, following a national industry assessment. Following their GP exercise referral scheme assessment by Quest both schemes were awarded the status of 'excellent'.

## **Report from District Cllr. Cllr Wendy Turner to Full Council**

General Fund Budget 2020/21- The budget was discussed and agreed at the full Council meeting on 27th Feb. The administration proposed a 1.66% increase in Council Tax (5p per week on a Band D property). The Government funding proposals for district councils were announced at the beginning of February, and MSDC are expecting to receive just over £4M made up of base funding, new homes bonus and rural services delivery grant. Total net expenditure of the Council is in the region of £10M so a further £6M odd is needed via Council Tax. The Council still has over £9M in reserves, some of which is to be used in specific projects, including another round of Member Locality Budgets and £500k for projects suggested by the Climate Change Task Group and an art trail in Stowmarket.

Housing Revenue Account 2020/21 - Housing Revenue Account is separate to the General Fund. The Government are now allowing rents to increase by CPI +1% so this is what is proposed. This equates to a rent increase of 2.7% (average £2.19 a week). The Debt Cap has now been removed so Councils are now able to borrow funds for Housing without worrying about breaching the cap. MSDC have gone into partnership with Icen Homes to deliver a number of affordable housing development over the next few years. There is a commitment to retain RTB receipts and to increase borrowing moderately to fund such developments.

Opposition groups' alternative proposals - The Green group and Lib Dem group have been working together on an alternative budget since November. Some of the ideas put forward were incorporated into the administration's budget, but we still did not feel enough was being done to future proof Mid Suffolk. We proposed that MSDC should build some zero-carbon homes, and promote more EV charging points in our towns, encourage more residents to spend time in Stowmarket and increase resources for additional highways expertise in planning. This proposal fell.

Gateway 14 - MSDC agreed to go enter a development management agreement with Jaynic Properties Limited to promote and develop the Gateway 14 site. The site currently has outline planning consent for B1, B2 and B8 uses. It is hoped that by entering into this working partnership the site can be promoted and developed in the near future. Part of the site was designated a Food Enterprise Zone and hopes to benefit from low carbon heat and energy solutions.

Planning - BMSDC Development Management team has been shortlisted in the Best Use of Digital and Technology category at the annual iESE – Public Sector Transformation Awards 2020. This award recognises the innovative use of digital tools and technology in order to improve services for residents. The planning application process has been streamlined for residents and we have become one of the top performing authorities for timely planning decisions. Public searches for planning information leapt from 600K in 2017 to 1.3m in 2018, with the introduction of electronic case management.

Woolpit Housing - After a testy debate at the planning referrals committee meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February as another development of 300 houses was passed, despite strong opposition from Woolpit PC, residents, and Green Councillors.

Locality Grant - A total of £7,350 of 2019/2020 Locality grant has be awarded to:

- New Green Community Centre Thurston - £1,820 towards CCTV cameras and £500 towards new picnic benches.
- Norton Village Hall - £2,100 towards fire shutters.
- Thurston Parish Council - £1000 towards the Gym Trail.

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- Friends of Thurston Library - £1,305 towards IT/ Programme training and SmartScreen equipment.
- Tostock Toddler Group - £625 towards equipment for their sensory area and a dance teacher.