

Annual report Draft

Economy

The Mid Suffolk administration continue to be strong on the economy, with the support of freeports and infrastructure that creates jobs and gives small businesses support. Start ups are a high priority with MSDC joining schemes to help people thinking of starting their own business. The new 2.45 million square ft Gateway 14 business park has now been approved and will be one if not the most up to date in the country it will include a tech hub to deliver cutting edge jobs and making MS a destination for technology and innovation. Another initiative, The Virtual High Street has been a big success giving shoppers a chance to browse local shops and to buy goods online. It's free and has 350 local shops, cafes and restaurants.

Last year Innovate Local gave businesses the use of a market stalls in Stowmarket and working space at the innovation hub in Eye alongside advice and training, helping small businesses move forward.

Careerosity was directed at 14 to 19 year olds looking to work in the film, music or gaming industry and was run for 2 days in several locations in Stowmarket last year.

Finance

The council continues to run a surplus even though more money is being spent on improving the lives of residents than ever before. A large amount of money is coming from the CIFCO investment fund where money was borrowed at low interest to buy a joint property fund with Babergh delivering rents of several commercial buildings across the country. This delivers an income, 12% of total council tax collected, that is similar to a large increase to bills. This is one of the reasons why Mid Suffolk has managed to freeze council tax while most councils around them have raised theirs. Last year the council invested £5.1 million into 39 projects from supporting victims of domestic abuse to helping landlords make houses more efficient. We also have an ambition to fund two electric busses to help residents get around the district in an environmentally friendly way and we have money allocated to replace aging waste freighters for more efficient new ones.

Housing

Mid Suffolk is dedicated to commissioning high quality sustainable housing as well as spending on temporary accommodation and reducing void times in the housing stock. Housing offices were nominated for an award last year when they went beyond the call of duty to provide 3 sites to house people that needed accommodation during the pandemic, one derelict site was transformed in just 5 days. They also led a country wide initiative to source 800 hotel rooms for hospital discharges, key workers and homeless. We continue to maintain, adapt and look to increase the housing stock whilst improving environmental performance and making our houses a better place to live.

Environment

We have a strategic objective to minimise carbon emissions and make adaptations within the district. Our waste freighters run on hydrotreated vegetable oil which reduces emissions and is far more sustainable in the supply chain. We are currently adapting our leisure centres. Stowmarket will have 500 solar panels generating 195kw and also an air source heat pump and all centres are now on a green energy tariff. This across MS and B is expected to reduce carbon by 269.9 tonnes 5.6% of the

annual carbon produced. There are also solar ports being built in the car park to charge EV and Hybrid cars.

We have £300,000 set aside to help community land trusts get mortgages. We have delivered trees to parishes right across Mid Suffolk helping residents plant trees on their own and council land. We have encouraged community orchards and are looking at reducing street lighting especially blue light from new developments to help wildlife and give a darker more natural night sky. The council organised a local energy showcase which champions green businesses and is in the process of creating a local walking and infrastructure plan.

Communities

Food banks have been extremely useful in tackling poverty in the district, the council continues to work with the Citizens Advice Bureau to stay on top of an increasing need. 43% of people using these are disabled or have a long term health issue. The CAB is funded around half its cost of service by MSDC. The food banks are a short-term solution to a problem and because it is very difficult to measure real need against poor management of food and money, we are working in other ways to deliver a longer term solution. The Food Savvy scheme has been around for a couple of years and is aiming to reduce food waste by 20%, it looks at planning meals, leftovers and using the freezer more effectively. Whilst ironically we are also dealing with childhood obesity with £38,000 allocated to tackling it in our schools.

£100,000 has been allocated to help homeless and at-risk people get involved in apprenticeships and alongside this, we are delivering The Rough Sleeper Initiative 4. We are supporting the previously homeless people leaving temporary accommodation and going into tenancy. Three dedicated officers at the council are working with people and families to try and prevent homelessness, while 4 outreach workers help get homeless people into temporary accommodation, handling over 100 applications in B and MS a year.

We are also supporting refugees. People from Afghanistan lucky enough to be eligible to come to the UK were helped and supported with bridging hotels and permanent accommodation in the community. Now with the war in Europe we are working to accommodate more and enabling willing residents to take Ukrainian families in too.

Mid Suffolk continue to support charities in the district like Community Action Suffolk, Homestart, Lighthouse Women's Aid and Rural Coffee Caravan amongst others in their important work, whilst working to identify any gaps in support and provision.

5 Year Land Supply

We are well on our way to adopting a Joint Local Plan making it much easier to refuse the speculative planning applications that are blighting Mid Suffolk. We have now completed our production of their Five-Year Land Supply Position Statement 2021. This shows from the 1st of April 2021 to the 31st of March 2026, the district to have a supply of 5,139 units and a requirement of 2,693 units, leaving a surplus of 2,446 units and a 9.54 year land supply. For Mid Suffolk, the 5YHLS requirement is 2,693 units between the 1st April 2021 to the 31st March 2026. This is based on the districts Local Housing Need figure (as calculated using the Standard Method, 513 dpa) plus a buffer of 5% as determined by the Housing Delivery Test (HDT). This means we are very much ahead of where we need to be in delivering housing need.

The Council is now using Chat Bots to help people navigate issues on the web site, which is constantly updated and staff work hard to get as much information on the pages as possible to help residents with issues quickly, we still have an office in Stowmarket and Eye to deal directly with customers. The working from home ambitions of the council were pushed forward by the pandemic and we now have a great deal of staff not travelling into the office day to day, this has saved car journeys and give us the opportunity to halve the floor space we rent at Endeavour House, saving even more money for the council, making more money available be spent on projects. Several informal meetings and briefings are now held online giving staff and councillors information whilst reducing travel time and expense. Formal meetings are still held in person for now. The Council continues to seek more devolution and is lobbying government to have more control over local issues that are dealt with by central government.

Locality Grants

Using the locality award scheme I have funded £2,986 towards the Loraine Victory hall renovation project, £2,248.51 to Bramford Scout and Guide HQ towards a new notice board, signage, heaters and emergency lights with another £1000 being processed towards the refurbishment of the old rocking horse and seesaw on the Bramford playing field. I'm happy to discuss any other funding requirements in the parish.

James Caston

Member for Bramford at Mid Suffolk District Council