

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Report - July 2021

Joint Local Plan Update

The Joint Local Plan examination hearing 'Stage 1 sessions' that were originally scheduled for June and July will now take place over a concentrated period from September, with the Stage 2 hearing sessions in mid-Autumn as originally planned. It was always the council's intention to hold the examination hearings predominantly in person but with ability of participants to join the hearing virtually. However technical hosting difficulties experienced on the first day (Monday June 21st) resulted in the proceedings not being able to meet the required needs of the participants. Now, with this change of dates, it will enable all the sessions to be held in public and be fully inclusive whilst ensuring public safety during the Covid-19 pandemic. Further details of these hearing sessions will be available on the Mid Suffolk DC website.

Biodiversity Initiative

As part of the council's biodiversity and climate change work, Mid Suffolk agreed to fund a project that will see a biodiversity mapping and tree canopy survey of the district carried out. The mapping will cover wildlife corridors and council-owned public realm sites, as well as county wildlife sites and local nature reserves. The survey's findings will be made available to the public via an interactive database.

'Virtual' High Street

Over one hundred new businesses have signed up to the Virtual High Street as the site launches in Hadleigh and Stowmarket, joining over 130 already signed up to the platform in Sudbury. The aim of the Virtual High Street is to bring the local high street and market stalls into the homes of customers before they visit the high street in person, making shopping local and supporting local businesses even easier.

CIFCO Business Plan

Councillors on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which is a cross-party committee, had the opportunity in their end of June meeting to examine in detail the CIFCO Business Plan for 2021/22, look at CIFCO's financial performance in 2020/21 and question the non-executive directors and CIFCO's various professional advisors. The committee approved, with no votes against and one abstention, the annual business plan ahead of its review by Full Council, which will happen at the September Full Council meeting. CIFCO is now fully invested (approx. £50million from each council) and the emphasis going forward will now change to be the day-to-day portfolio management whilst looking for value added opportunities within the existing diverse portfolio.

Localities Grants 2021/22

A reminder that the 2021/22 localities grant scheme has now gone live and your two district councilors have a combined pot of £14,700 to support local projects in this current year.

Leisure Centre Upgrades

The Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in Stowmarket opened its doors in mid-June to its new £2.2million upgrade and extension. The work, funded by Mid Suffolk DC, means that gym-goers can enjoy a range of state-of-the-art fitness equipment with the number of stations increased from 50 to 100. There are refurbished showers and toilets as well as poolside improvements. This is part of a number of initiatives in Stowmarket, our key market town and part of our wider Vision for Stowmarket which includes the new Regal Theatre that reopened in June.

Needham Market Lake Café

The busy end of June also saw the start of work on the ground commence to deliver a brand-new visitor centre and café at the Needham Market lake. As one of the region's most visited free tourism attractions, Needham Market Lake will have even more to offer visitors with this new café with indoor and outdoor seating and a community events space. The facility should open before the end of the year.

Policing Update (TP)

Speeding

Recorded offences have only decreased by 8% to c. 37000 across Suffolk. Enforcement is continuing county wide and will be assisted by the County Council sponsored mobile ANPR scheme, supported by the police.

Orwell Crossing

There have been 3 occasions when the reduced 40 mph limit has been used in 3 months and compliance (anecdotally) has been good although results have yet to be evaluated after 6 months data.

Domestic Abuse and Recorded Crime Data

Recorded cases are up by around 10%, mental health calls are also up and online crime is up by over a third. Extra resources are being put in place in the cyber-crime unit to catch criminals. There should also be a joint agency initiative soon to help improve online safety and to tackle fraud as a separate item.

Climate Change and Carbon Reduction

As agreed at public sector leaders all councils and the Constabulary is committed to our net zero ambition. We hope to publish the police strategy by the end of this year and is an integral part of the new police and crime plan

Recruitment

This is proving to be very successful and by March next year officer strength should be around 1330 FTE

Covid

The relaxation on July 19th is very welcome news but not without its risks / challenges in Suffolk. So please do all you can to follow government guidance.

There are pockets in some wards where vaccination rates are much lower which is a cause for concern and every effort is being made to raise jab rates by having mobile and "walk in on demand" centres coupled with better communication including where necessary door to door knocking.

Tim Passmore & John Whitehead

(our contact details are on parish noticeboards and on the MSDC's website)