

District Cllr AGM Report Thurston Ward

Beyton, Norton, Thurston, Tostock, Stowlangtoft

2023/2024

Summary

The new Mid Suffolk District Councillors continued the growth of Gateway 14 with 1600 new jobs created and more to come in 2024. It was agreed to invest £18.7 million in building a skills and innovation centre on the Gateway 14 site. This will consist of office space and training areas. This will focus on providing a starting place for new businesses and the skills needed for the new 'Green Industries'. This will increase the skills level of our residents.

'Cozy Homes' initiative with £2 million available for residents as grants for insulation to make their homes warmer and lower their heating costs.

The Joint Local Plan was approved. We have a land supply of over 10 years.

2024/25 budget was approved. The MSDC part of the council tax will be increased by 2% which is lower than most councils in the country. The MSDC part of the council tax bill is about 8% with the rest to Suffolk County Council and the Police. The council also approved changes to the second home and empty home council tax charges. There are more than 680 empty properties in Mid Suffolk, which councillors are keen to see used to meet growing housing need.

Councils already impose a council tax premium on the owners of properties that are empty and unfurnished for two years or longer, but under new legislation, the councils would be able to target empty properties after just one year from April 2024 – and impose a levy on second homeowners from April 2025. Both councils agreed a new joint policy that will see the owners of properties left empty for a year or more paying double, with a premium of up to 100% from April 2024; properties empty for five years or more seeing their council tax bills treble with a premium of up to 200%; and owners of properties left empty for 10 years facing quadrupled bills, with a premium of up to 300%.

Cllr David Bradbury became a member of the Licencing Committee and the Council representative of the Network Rail East West Rail Partnership. He agreed to take a special interest in all matters relating to railways and integrated transport within the Thurston Ward. £100k CIL funds was invested with Network Rail on a feasibility study to replace the Thurston barrow crossing. The final report is expected shortly. Council have agreed to set up a Community Rail Partnership with Anglia rail.

Following specific training support is now available for '20 is plenty'. Support was given to Tostock and the community wish to have a speed limit on Church Road. All £7500 locality funds were invested within the ward during the year.

Cllr Austin Davies accepted roles as Director of the MSDC holding company and CIFCO, a member of the planning committee and the joint Audit Committee. During 2023 CIFCO added the Stanton Co-op to the 21 commercial real estate properties. MSDC originally invested £100 million. 2024 valuation has a further reduction in value to £80 million. A capital expenditure plan was created during the year. It has been agreed that MSDC, in the next 3/4 years, will not be

making any further funds available. Rental income remains strong, however, higher interest rates are like to reduce the net income to £1 million. Established a plan to upgrade the Energy Performance Certificate to at least a C rating by 2027.

Worked with Gatehouse/CAB and Thurston Parish Council to set up a system of the provision of food parcels for those that are eligible. Please encourage families in need to contact either Gatehouse in Bury St Edmunds or CAB in Stowmarket.

By the end of 2023 helped (along with many other folks) to obtain community access to the Thurston Community College fitness suite. In addition, various clubs can now use the sports hall (pickleball) and the main hall. All £7500 locality funds were invested within the ward during the year.

Full report:-

MSDC meeting

First of this administration was on the 22nd May.

Mid Suffolk District Council welcomed the newly elected Councillors. Rowland Warboys was elected Chairman and Councillor Andy Mellen as leader. A six member cabinet was announced. Elections to all the appropriate MSDC posts was carried out. Presentation of long service awards was made following this meeting. A wide range of Councillor training was delivered. Cllr David Bradbury became a member of the Licencing Committee and the Council representative of the Network Rail East West Rail Partnership. He agreed to take a special interest in all matters relating to railways and integrated transport within the Thurston Ward. Cllr Austin Davies accepted roles as Director of the MSDC holding company and CIFCO, a member of the planning committee and the joint Audit Committee.

Mid Suffolk District Council held its July meeting in Elmswell at the Blackboure Leisure Centre. A motion asking the Government to think again about the overland route of renewable energy from Norwich to Tilbury was passed. Reduction position of greenhouse gases by Mid Suffolk District Council was presented. Our Chief Executive reported on the conduct of the May elections and outlined the plan to ensure that the errors did not occur again.

At the August MSDC meeting 'Pride in your Place' initiative was launched. All Parish Councils were invited to apply for grants to help improve the look of all of our villages.

Mid Suffolk District Council meeting held in September. The State of the District report was considered at last month's Full Council meeting, which set out an overview of Mid Suffolk. This is part of the evidence base underpinning the new Corporate Plan. Mid Suffolk Cabinet will be endorsing the engagement strategy for the development of the new Corporate Plan. It is hoped to engage with as wide a section of the district as possible, including some groups which seldom get involved, as well as businesses and Town and Parish Councils. The CIFCO business plan was agreed which included a reduction in payment to the council. Given the change in administration this included a thorough review of operations prior to the next business case being brought to Council to inform MSDC's long term strategies.

MSDC discussed the Electric Bus project at Cabinet this month. They hope to bring forward the ringfenced £820k and agree to work towards a 'grant' scheme to enhance existing rural transport provision with set routes.

Mid Suffolk District Council meeting held in October. MSDC asked all residents views on what matters most to each of our communities completing the survey which was available on the website until the 15th November.

Working with Groundwork East MSDC provided help to local businesses to reach net zero.

CIFCO completed the purchase of the Co-Op building in Stanton.

MSDC will be launched its 'cozy homes' initiative in November which will make insulation available to appropriate households in our District. This was the £2 million special provision set aside in our Councils 2023/24 budget.

It is for:

- *Residents of Mid Suffolk:* Whether you are a private tenant, a homeowner, or a landlord with fewer than five properties, this scheme is for you.
- *Financial Criteria:* Your household income should be less than £60,000 per year, with savings not exceeding £16,000.
- *EPC Rating:* Your home should have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating between D and G.
- *Council Tax Banding:* Your property should fall within council tax bands A to E.

It covers loft insulation (including loft clearance), cavity wall insulation, draft proofing and possibly also other forms of insulation where appropriate.

Council passed a planning guidance note on Solar Farms. Applicants are encouraged to work closely with local communities before making an application. Weight is given to food production and also landscapes, however, there has been no response to the request to the Minister for guidance.

Mid Suffolk District Council meeting held in November and the BMSDC Joint Local Development Scheme and BMSDC Joint Local Plan was passed. This sets out the planning policy for the District. Joint Local Plan, Part 2 which included the settlement boundaries for all our towns and villages, is being prepared.

There was no Mid Suffolk District Council meeting in December.

Mid Suffolk District Council's cabinet approved a full business case for delivery of the first work package of the Stowmarket Health, Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF) project. They accepted a recommendation to put £450,000 towards the £2.4million scheme, with the remaining funding already identified from a range of external sources alongside Section 106 contributions. The initial works also include an improved pitch for Stowmarket Rugby Club, community running track, cricket nets and additional paths and fencing.

Mid Suffolk District Council met in January and thanked our local volunteers and residents for their work during the flooding caused by storm Babet. About 300 homes and 40 businesses were flooding within our district. It was agreed that the MSDC chair would write to all Parish Councils asking them to revisit or create their flooding plan.

A new council strategic plan was approved and focuses on four elements (housing, residents, wellbeing, and environment).

The siting of polling stations was confirmed. (Beyton – All Saints, Norton and Stowlangtoff – Norton Village hall, Tostock – Village Hall, Thurston- New Green Centre and Cavendish Hall.

It was agreed to invest £18.7 million in building a skills and innovation centre on the Gateway 14 site. This will consist of office space and training areas. This will focus on providing a starting place for new businesses and the skills needed for the new 'Green Industries'.

Finally, Council agreed to create a Community Rail Partnership with Anglia rail.

Mid Suffolk District Council meeting in February. The budget was approved. The MSDC part of the council tax will be increased by 2% which is lower than most councils in the country. The MSDC part of the council tax bill is about 8% with the rest to Suffolk County Council and the Police.

The council also approved changes to the second home and empty home council tax charges. There are more than 680 empty properties in Mid Suffolk, which councillors are keen to see used to meet growing housing need.

The councils already impose a council tax premium on the owners of properties that are empty and unfurnished for two years or longer, but under new legislation, the councils would be able to target empty properties after just one year from April 2024 – and impose a levy on second home owners from April 2025.

At meetings this week, both councils agreed a new joint policy that will see the owners of properties left empty for a year or more paying double, with a premium of up to 100% from April 2024; properties empty for five years or more seeing their council tax bills treble with a premium of up to 200%; and owners of properties left empty for 10 years facing quadrupled bills, with a premium of up to 300%.

Owners of 542 second homes in Mid Suffolk will see their council tax bill double from April 2025. The definition of a second home for council tax purposes would be a property which there is 'no one resident' but that is 'substantially furnished'. There will be exceptions, in line with Government policy, expected to include properties being actively marketed for sale or rent for a limited period, houses going through probate, caravan pitches or houseboat moorings (I can't think of many houseboats in the area)

Mid Suffolk District Council has launched a new rural transport grants scheme to help provide passenger transport routes across the district, connecting local communities and reducing emissions, by providing viable alternatives to solo car journeys.

MSDC have approved a grant to New Green Community Trust for new doors at Thurston's New Green Centre - £10,000.00

Mid Suffolk District Council meeting in March had a presentation and discussion on the proposed devolution bill with a new role of 'Mayor of Suffolk'. It is currently unclear how this new position would work and whether it would bring new funds to our county or just redirect existing moneys.

Community Infrastructure Levy was reviewed and approved for the coming year (Cllr Bradbury was appointed to the committee) as was the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. Our council continues to focus our services and network with other agencies to minimise the number of cases.

Gateway 14 –

The building of the 'Range' warehouse was completed by the end of 2023.

The Range has confirmed the creation of over 1,600 new jobs by early 2024. This is a major distribution hub. They envisage 3 shifts running 24/7. They will be running electric buses between Stowmarket station and Gateway 14 (considering visiting surrounding villages as well). We are exploring options for extending the route to the surrounding villages.

A second company will move onto the site with their own dedicated building.

CIFCO

During 2023 the 21 commercial real estate properties were revalued at £82 million down 12% from £94 million. MSDC originally invested £100 million. 2024 valuation has a further reduction in value to £80 million. A capital expenditure plan was created during the year. It has been agreed that MSDC, in the next 3/4 years, will not be making any further funds available. Rental income remains strong, however, higher interest rates are likely to reduce the net income to £1 million. Established a plan to upgrade the Energy Performance Certificate to at least a C rating by 2027.

Planning

DC/19/02090 Given the 10 years plus already approved housing supply MSDC decided not to give permission for these 210 houses in Thurston. Gladman took this case to a public appeal. The hearing was held on the July 4 in Elmwell (no venue was available locally). MSDC lost the appeal DC/19/02090 (Gladman) for 210 homes to the North of Ixworth Road, Thurston, however, this developer will fund active traffic lights at the Bunbury Arms crossing, install two 'Tiger' crossing points on Norton Road by the Thurston Community College and an area for skate park/pods.

MSDC lost the appeal DC/19/02090 (Gladman) for 210 homes to the North of Ixworth Road, Thurston, however, the council took legal action to overturn this decision. This case was heard in January 2024 and the outcome is pending.

MSDC lost the appeal (APP/W3520/W/23/3316136 - DC/22/0194) on 9 self builds off Ixworth Road, Norton, however, this developer will have to install a crossing point on Ixworth Road before first occupation.

Linden Homes Phase 3 application increased the number of homes granted under outline planning of 200 to a total of 261. Both Cllrs and Thurston Parish Council's objected to this application, however, it was passed by the planning committee. These homes will have heat pumps and provision for solar panels.

The Planning Inspectorate have finished the inspection of the BMSDC Joint Local Plan part 1 and reported that it is sound, so it now needs to be formally adopted by Full Council. Planning policy officers are now able to focus on Part 2 of the plan which will include the housing allocations. All the documentation is available on the website <http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/jointlocalplan>

Supported the application for a new telco mast in Tostock (Ticehurst area).

Joint Local Validation List Consultation - Monday 22 January 2024 to Monday 4 March 2024
Since our Local Validation List (LVL) was amended last year, our new Joint Local Plan (JLP) has been adopted and the LVL has undergone further revisions as a consequence. These revisions are such that formal six week consultation will be required, giving interested parties an opportunity to make any comments prior to the Joint LVL being adopted.

Please follow the link below for further information and to make comments on the latest Joint Local Validation List Consultation.

Target date has been re-set as the 8th May for applications DC/23/02429 and DC/23/02430.

Wellbeing for younger and older residents

MSDC have supported an initiative with schools across the district to improve the well-being of young people. Thurston Community College, Stowmarket High School and Stowupland High School now have Youth Link workers to help pupils access community activities. This work will also spread to the feeder primary schools. MSDC is also supporting Silver Sunday Campaigns to help tackle loneliness for older residents. Events are being held in Eye, Stowmarket and Needham Market to bring young people into care homes for sing-alongs, games and fun.

CIL applications

Supported Norton Village Halls application for £100K towards its redevelopment. Cllr Bradbury and Cllr Davies continue to support the expansion project for Thurston Library. Details of the £100 k for the rail crossing feasibility study follows

Network Rail.

Work has been carried out with SCC highways, Anglia rail, footfall work and investigation of the old tunnel and station building. The feasibility study should have been completed by 31st October 2023. It is still not available. Focus is now need on building a funding case to the Department of Transport. Thurston Parish Council's view on level of District CIL (which was supported by Cllr Bradbury and Davies) to be committed has been passed to the MSDC Cabinet.

20's Plenty

Cllr Bradbury attended a 20s Plenty seminar. Plenty of useful information is now available that will allow villages to request lower speed limits – for example, speed surveys should not be required these days as SCC has access to the “connected vehicle data” which shows the speeds for all roads in a parish also any new residential developments could be requested to have a 20mph limit applied as a condition of planning.

Flooding.

The worst flooding in the villages (that we're aware of) was the road between Beyton & Thurston but If any properties have experienced flooding damage, grants are available from MSDC to

assist. Apparently, this is the wettest February on record, so some locations are suffering from flooding despite not being affected previously.

Gatehouse/Citizen's Advice Bureau

Worked with Gatehouse/CAB and Thurston Parish Council to set up a system of the provision of food parcels for those that are eligible. Please encourage families in need to contact either Gatehouse in Bury St Edmunds or CAB in Stowmarket.

A14

Supporting the Tostock campaign to have the village speed limit further along Church Road

Thurston Community College meeting

During a meeting with the College head, it was exciting to learn that Suffolk County Council have now acquired the additional land that is needed for both additional parking and new playing field area and the expansion/new school build.

By the end of 2023 TCC gave community access to the fitness suite. In addition, various clubs can use the sports hall (pickleball) and the main hall.

Autumn Tree/hedge planting

Can you please consult with your communities on potential areas for tree/hedge planting and then contact us with the details. MSDC supplied plants for the boundary hedge to the new Thurston cemetery. Cllrs helped plant these specimens.

Thurston

BMSDC Chief Executive Officer was escorted by Cllr Bradbury on a tour of the village which involved visiting to the various developments, the railway station with its Barrow crossing.

Arranged for a meeting to be held at the Parish Offices with the strategic Planning Officers. The objective being to have a clear agreement that any future developments meets the needs of our community.

Locality grants

We have now been able to support Norton village hall. All funds have been allocated before this financial year end. This link gives the detail for both Cllr Bradbury and Cllr Davies.

Applications from the 'Pickle ball club and the Thurston Parish Council to support the Local Bus project. Both David and Austin approved two applications of support from the Thurston Scouts for new recreational equipment.

We have agreed to support Beyton Environmental Group in their sowing of a wildflower mix on the pond spoil area of the village green.

We have agreed to support Thurston Primary School as their request for Pickleball equipment.

We have now been able to support Tostock village hall and the knitting/crochet club and Stowlangtoft variable speed signs and its village newsletter.

<https://www.babergh.gov.uk/documents/d/mid-suffolk/msdc-locality-awards-27-march-2024>

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