

## **MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILLORS MIKE NORRIS & STEVE PHILLIPS REPORT 20<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2020**

**Council Tax – 2020/21 Budget:** The first draft of Mid Suffolk District Council's budget for 2020/21 was considered by Mid Suffolk cabinet members on Monday 13th January and by Overview and Scrutiny on Thursday 16th January, and included a 1.66% increase in its share of Council Tax, adding £2.76 a year to the bill of a Band D Property, equivalent to just over 5p per week. It will go to Full Council in February and, if approved, will come into effect on 1st April 2020.

Headlines include:

- 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.
- 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.
- After four years of government-enforced reductions, the council is also proposing putting up council house rents by 2.7% - meaning a £2.19 per week increase for tenants. Sheltered housing tenants also face an increase of £2 a week on their bills plus a 62p a week increase to their utility bills.
- A reserve of £500,000 set aside for 2020/21 to tackle climate change.

**Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils consider moves to clamp down on Council Tax fraud – whilst helping those in need:** At a Mid Suffolk Cabinet Meeting on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> January it was resolved that penalties be introduced to tackle Council Tax fraud, alongside a new protocol to help those in genuine need, and the adoption of the Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol. Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils have a statutory duty to collect Council Tax across their districts, which is then divided between Suffolk County Council, the Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner, the districts themselves, and the local parish or town councils. The new penalties policy will give the councils the option to issue an initial penalty of £70 to anyone refusing to meet requests to supply legally required information, or failing to let the council know about changes in their circumstances which would affect their entitlement to a discount, exemption or Council Tax reduction.

**Next phase in development of Needham Lake visitor centre and café agreed:** Plans for a £600,000 visitor centre/café at Needham Lake have been approved and a local operator selected to run it. Plans for the new centre which will function as a community event space, café/restaurant, and feature a Changing Places facility (fully accessible toilet), were granted planning permission at a 11th December 2019 Mid Suffolk Development Control meeting. The centre with its proposed facilities will improve the offer to visitor and residents at the East of England's most visited free attraction. Additionally the local economy will benefit with the provision of a new community venue and more outdoor leisure activities. 127 Trading Limited, a trading entity of The Mix, Stowmarket, has been selected as preferred tenants of the centre. They will manage the day to day running of the centre and café/restaurant on a ten-year lease. Working in partnership with the community they will offer a variety of refreshments, a seasonal menu and a range of events and activities including evening events. The next phase of the development will be the appointment and selection of a contractor. Following the tender process works are proposed to start in spring 2020.

**Improved access to Needham Market railway station:** Meetings are continuing to be held involving Network Rail, MSDC and SCC officers, with the aim of improving the access to and from the Ipswich bound platform. Mid Suffolk and Network Rail are jointly funding a feasibility study.

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