

District Councillor's Report for Creting St Peter Parish Council November 2018

Locality Grants

I still have a small proportion of my locality budget available to be used for any project in the village which will benefit the community of Creting St Peter. Please get in touch with me if you have something in mind.

Tree for Life scheme

A Green Party initiative funded from MSDC's 2018/2019 budget, the scheme encourages the planting of a tree for new born and newly adopted children. All families within Mid Suffolk who have received a new family member between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2018 are welcome to apply for a free tree to celebrate a new life or adoption. The scheme aims to encourage the planting of trees and promote the benefits which trees bring to communities. Details and an application form can be found at:

<https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/news/mid-suffolk-offers-new-arrivals-a-tree-for-life/>

Investment in Stowmarket

I am pleased to see that the Council is investing in Stowmarket (rather than just investing in warehouses and shops in other parts of the country). Having purchased the former NatWest bank, Mid Suffolk has recently acquired the building formerly occupied by food store chain Aldi and more recently by Family Bargains, including its car park on Gipping Way. We are waiting to see what the plans will be for the building, but the Council will now be managing and collecting revenue from parking on the site. Work on the car park has started and is expected to take approximately two weeks.

Gateway 14

As Chair of the Council's Scrutiny Committee, and as the Local Councillor, I am asking for details of the business plan for the development to be available. Development details will need to be taken through the planning process so that all reserved matters can be considered. I will keep you informed as and when more information becomes available. We need to make sure that measures are put in place to prevent extra traffic using unsuitable local roads as rat runs to the site.

Consultations

The District Council are currently consulting on a Homes Strategy and a Homelessness Reduction Strategy. Consultation on both will end on 7 December. It is hoped that, before the end of 2018, consultation will begin on a Community Strategy. Next up will be the consultation on the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan; this will be a key document to help prevent inappropriate speculative housing developments obtaining planning permission.

Energy and Water Efficient Homes

The first motion that I put to Council after my election in 2015 was to propose that MSDC draw up plans for energy efficient council homes. Conservative councillors were against my proposal and voted instead 'to investigate how to achieve the aspiration' to build energy efficient homes. No progress has been made towards achieving that aspiration and so, at the October meeting of Council, I called upon the Cabinet Member for Housing to give a firm commitment. All I have received from the Cabinet Member so far is a response that the Council has built 38 new council homes in the last 3 years, none to the standard that I have been seeking, and a statement in the draft Homes Strategy that, in the period 2019 to 2024, the development of an energy efficient standard for some new builds will be explored. So, by 2024, MSDC may well have taken 9 years and still not built a single new home to a high standard of energy efficiency.

Five Year Land Supply for New Housing Developments

Members were given a briefing recently following the Planning Inspector's decision to allow an appeal made by a developer against MSDC's decision to refuse an application for 49 homes in open agricultural land south of Woolpit. Rachel Eburne, leader of the opposition group asked again that extra staff be appointed to ensure as far as possible that developments which have been permitted come forward to construction rather than sit in a land bank or stall due to the slow pace of negotiations between relevant parties. Once again we were told that existing staff would be covering this extra work. Our fear is that other planning work could be delayed or be less effective if extra staff are not taken on.

Scrutiny Committee

In the next few months, some major issues will be matters for the Scrutiny Committee, which I chair. One of these will be the business case for the development of the land in Needham Market where the MSDC HQ buildings and car parks currently are. I am hoping to see a high standard of housing, including units for sale and for social rent. The refuse collection contract is due to be renewed, either by negotiated extension or re-tendering; likewise the

recycling contract; and the contract for provision of leisure facilities at our sports centres at Stowmarket and Stradbroke. The business cases and contract procedures for all these are likely to come to the Scrutiny Committee early in 2019. It is the job of the committee to question the work of Cabinet Members and officers to ensure that they give good service to residents in a lawful, effective and cost-effective way.

Needham Lake

Needham Lake is one of the most popular free all-year-round visitor attractions in the East of England, but it has very limited facilities for visitors. I welcome proposals by MSDC to provide more facilities, especially an outlet offering a variety of refreshments, better toilets and more on-site supervision.

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