

District Councillor Report: Andy Mellen - Bacton ward

Bacton, Cotton, Finningham, Westhorpe and Wyverstone

January 2024

Empty homes and Council Tax	To incentivise bringing more homes back into use, MSDC is proposing to increase the amount of Council Tax payable on long-term empty homes. Currently these attract a levy of 50% on the Council Tax payable. The new policy will be levies of 100% for empty homes being left for one (to five) years, 200% for five (to ten) years and 300% for ten years or more. Exceptions will apply – such as property under probate or properties undergoing major repairs. If approved, this will be from April 2024. Additionally, it is proposed that second homes attract a 100% levy. If approved, this will be from April 2025 as a year’s notice has to be given. There had been the opportunity to increase some of these from 2019 but the previous administration did not take these up.
Greenhouse gas emissions	MSDC has published its Greenhouse Gas Emissions report for 2022/23 which shows a continuing reduction in emissions against 2018/19 when the Council declared a climate emergency and committed to be carbon neutral by 2030. The leisure centres are the biggest cause of emissions. As the first reductions made are the “low-hanging fruit”, there will be a lot more work required to continue this downward trend.
Fees & charges for 2024/25	For the annual review process of setting fees or charges MSDC has to consider factors such as inflation and the hours involved. The Council cannot charge for some statutory services and national Government sets others. Discretionary charges, such as vehicle licensing, litter bin emptying and pavement licensing, can be set locally and for these MSDC aims to cover costs.
Stowmarket sports facilities improvements	MSDC Cabinet is proposing approval of the full business case of the Stowmarket Sports Health and Leisure Project to allow the first stage, covering new and updated sports facilities, to go ahead. This includes a 3G pitch, special athletics track, multi-games area (MUGA), improving existing pitches and other facilities. If Council approves this, it is hoped work can start in 2024.
Free home insulation for qualifying properties	The <i>Cosy Homes</i> initiative launched with a £2 million fund and we are encouraging householders to apply. Eligible households can apply for free energy efficiency measures in their own homes, including if privately rented. Full details to be available via www.midsuffolk.gov.uk This initiative is in addition to a programme of retrofit for the Council’s own housing stock. Also, particularly vulnerable households can continue to access help via the wider Suffolk scheme, www.warmhomessuffolk.org
Flooding	The heavy rainfall is continuing to cause flooding in various places. I have been reporting incidents to highways and also arranged for flood officers to visit flooding hotspots across the villages. Flood payments (of £500 for residents and £2,500 for businesses) are being processed by Mid Suffolk on the basis of information from the SCC highways reporting tool and information submitted to MSDC. Affected households may also be eligible for a discount on council tax.
Locality Award	A reminder that this year’s locality awards are still open for applications. Any group or organisation can apply for amounts of £250 or more. Please contact me for an application form.
Planning application on the former Bacton middle school site	This planning application is still under consideration and will come to the planning committee sometime in the next couple of months.

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