

District Councillor's Report for Westhorpe Parish Council – January 2021

Covid 19	<p>With the new lockdown in place and likely to continue for some weeks, residents have two helplines available in case of need:</p> <p>The Home, But Not Alone phonenumber supports vulnerable people in our communities who may be struggling with the impact of Coronavirus. The telephone number is freephone 0800 876 6926 and will be staffed from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.</p> <p>There is also the Suffolk Advice and Support Service phonenumber (0800 068 3131) which helps with debt, benefits, employment or housing worries.</p> <p>Mid Suffolk is also administering payments of grants to businesses forced to close or suffering a significant loss of income during the current lockdown period.</p>
Finningham flooding	<p>The persistent flooding next to the building site on Westhorpe road is proving difficult to resolve: County Council Highways say it does not meet their threshold for action due to strict spending limits. The developer has offered to help solve the problem but needs Highways permission to do so. Nobody seems to know where the drains run to!</p>
2019/2020 general fund expenditure	<p>The predicted underspend on the revenue account is £848k, due largely to unfilled staff vacancies and delays in programmed projects. The capital account is also underspent due to delays in commencing projects and making programmed investments.</p>
Joint Local Plan	<p>The draft Joint Local Plan was discussed at full Council in November and was approved (though I voted against it). There was then a 6-week technical consultation which finished on 24th Dec. Next stage is examination by an Independent planning inspector, which is scheduled for this summer.</p>
2020/2021 Budget	<p>The budget setting process is under way; this will be a more difficult exercise than usual due to the uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. MSDC has suffered a loss of income and extra costs. Also, more and more residents are unable to make payments of council tax and council rents.</p>
Investment in commercial properties (CIFCO)	<p>MSDC has made further investments in properties in Luton and Epsom for £10.5 million and plans to spend a further £15 million making a total of £50 million, all paid for on long-term loans. The property portfolio continues to decrease in value; two of the properties have been without tenants and some 30% of rental income is unpaid or delayed. Nevertheless, the Leader of MSDC is quoted as saying, 'Through these careful investments, CIFCO will continue to bring in much-needed income to support our district's recovery post-Covid'.</p>
Infrastructure Funding Statement	<p>A report on the major infrastructure projects for Mid Suffolk was presented to Cabinet in November and published on the MSDC website on 11 December. Projects for future funding, partly through Community Infrastructure Levy, include a new bridge and lifts at Stowmarket Rail Station and an increase in capacity at Bacton and Mendlesham surgeries.</p>

Councillor Andy Mellen

Andrew.Mellen@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Telephone: 01449 782971 m: 07790 992619