

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS'

REPORT TO THE 2019 CLAYDON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

District Elections

Elections to the 26 new wards that comprise Mid Suffolk District Council, after the boundary changes, took place on Thursday 2nd May 2019. All the wards were contested in this election. Overall turnout was 34.0% although in the Claydon & Barham ward turnout was marginally lower at 31%. The 26 wards comprise of 34 seats with some wards, such as Claydon & Barham, being twice the electoral size of a single member ward and therefore represented by two councillors. Claydon & Barham again returned two Conservative councillors and our contact details can be found at the end of this report. District-wide however produced a different outcome with a finely balanced council now of 16 Conservatives, 1 Independent, 12 Greens and 5 Liberal Democrats. At the time of writing this report, this change from the previous large Conservative majority means that there is much still to be resolved. However, the Conservatives, as the largest party, intend to form an Administration to run the council.

Local Planning Issues

When we reported to you a year ago for 2018 annual meeting, the large planning application at Whitton Rural had been refused at committee and the large Barham Church Lane application had a 'minded to refuse' status. The Whitton applicant took their application to appeal and the planning inspector heard that appeal at a public enquiry before Christmas. Mid Suffolk, as promised, put up a rigorous and costly defence of their committee decision at the appeal. Very unusually, the applicant requested during the appeal that the site be looked at as two-part sites, separated by the treeline at the top of Whitton hill, should the inspector not feel able to grant permission for the full site. When the decision was announced early February, the inspector did grant permission for the southern part on the plateau behind the tree line but refused the northern part on the flank of the hill, visible from and encroaching close to Claydon. It is good news that the inspector has made clear that the landscape within the valley should not be built on but it is desperately sad news for those few residents in Whitton Rural whose quiet rural idyll could now be subsumed within a large housing estate which is effectively an extension of Ipswich.

During 2018 a further application for 72 houses off Ely Road came before the planning committee but your district councillors argued for it to be deferred to be heard at the same time as the Church Lane application at a planning referrals committee. The reason that they have not yet been presented before that larger committee is primarily due to Barham PC commissioning their own independent traffic analysis of the impact of these two large developments. Many local people have expressed their views that the County Highways traffic impact assessments of these developments are inadequate and we have heard similar stories from other district councillors and from other communities whilst attending planning committees. We support and applaud the work done by Barham PC in opposing these unwanted applications.

There is not space in this report to report back on all the many smaller applications throughout the ward but, as a general rule, we have agreed with the parish councils that smaller infills can and should deliver needed new homes and, if clearly sustainable, they have been supported. We have also put pressure on the planning enforcement team to investigate concerns raised by residents.

We share residents' frustrations on how slowly many of these enforcement cases seem to progress within the system.

Mid Suffolk have now established a robust five-year housing land supply. It was called into question in 2018 when one planning inspector would not include any approved outline applications within the overall housing figures. This seemed a bizarre outcome and Mid Suffolk worked closely with the relevant developers to establish delivery timetables for approved sites thus re-establishing a satisfactory five-year position. This should prove to be a useful aid when speculative sites are now put forward by land owners and developers.

Joint Local Plan and Neighbourhood Planning

There has been some unfortunate delay in respect of the district's Joint Local Plan being developed in conjunction with Babergh District Council. The high level of response to the last consultation round did need to be subject to proper consideration and evaluation. However, doing this inevitably impacted the timetable. Revised timetables have now been established, including a final round of consultation, prior to the Joint Local Plan going for formal inspection. The District Council is also very keen to support parishes with their own Neighbourhood Plans and has set aside a budget that should adequately fund this. We are pleased to see that locally the three parishes of Claydon, Barham and Great Blakenham are coming together to work on a Joint Neighbourhood Plan and hope that enough local volunteers can be found to assist with this important but time-consuming task.

Localities Grants

We have worked again this year with local parish councils and local groups to identify where our individual Mid Suffolk councillor-allocated locality grant funding can fully or partly deliver needed community improvements. We have fully funded two vehicle activated speed signs – one in Hemingstone that was commissioned in February and one for Barham which is still awaiting installation approval – which should not only alert traffic to their speed in the 30mph zones but also provide useful analytical speed data for the parishes. We have contributed to the replacement of all the chairs at the Henley Community Centre and contributed the main part of the expense in putting in new quiet extractor fans in Claydon & Barham village hall toilets along with some electrical work and dimmer switches in the main room.

YOUR DISTRICT COUNCILLORS in the Claydon & Barham Ward subsequent to the 2nd May 2019 district council election are:-

John Whitehead : 01473 833279 or john.whitehead@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Tim Passmore : 01449 767131 or timothy.passmore@midsuffolk.gov.uk

[For the period under review, 2018/19, your district councillors were John Whitehead and James Caston. James has now been elected to the neighbouring new Bramford Ward]