

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS'

REPORT TO THE 2021 ANNUAL PARISH MEETINGS IN THE CLAYDON & BARHAM WARD

The 2021 parish annual meeting gives us the opportunity to look back on the District Council year 2020/21 and set out briefly our thoughts on some matters, both district-wide and more locally.

Local Planning Issues

Some long-standing large planning applications in the Claydon & Barham Ward came to their conclusions towards the end of 2020/21. The big three applications, by number of dwellings, were the outline application 1856/17 for 269 homes north of Church Lane, Barham, the outline application 18/00861 for 67 homes off Ely Road, Claydon that included land in both Claydon and Barham and the reserved matters application 20/03704 for 190 homes off the Old Norwich Road in Whitton Rural. Your district councillors paid close attention to all these applications from the start of public consultations and attended many meetings with the parish councils and residents. We were therefore able to articulate the many concerns of most residents when these applications finally came to be heard by the planning committees. Despite our best efforts and passionately expressed views, we were unable to persuade a majority on these committees to refuse these applications. All these applications were recommended for approval by the planning officers and these sites are deemed sustainable due to the existing village facilities and their closeness to Ipswich and the A14 corridor. The 'tilted balance in favour of sustainable development' within the National Planning Policy Framework meant that we were always fighting an uphill battle. There will be more work to be done when these outline permissions come back for approval of the detailed reserved matters. In the case of the reserved matters for the Whitton application we did manage some small but still important wins for neighbouring residents.

As well as these big applications, there has, of course, been many smaller planning applications in the ward during 2020/21. Again, we have taken note of the thoughts and concerns of the relevant parish council and affected local residents and reinforced those in our discussions with the relevant planning officers.

Localities Grants

Each Mid Suffolk councillor is allocated a Localities Grants pot of £7,350 each year, so for the Claydon & Barham Ward with its two councillors we had a total of £14,700. We pooled our grants and each application we received was supported on a 50/50 basis. In the year 2020/21, grants were awarded to the Coddendam Support Group to assist with their Covid support and to develop the Group's website, to the Coddendam Community Centre to fund security for the centre and the installation of a new alarm and access system, to Barham Parish Council for a second vehicle speed activated sign for installation near an accident black-spot, to Ashbocking Parish Council to purchase a large storage container for their maintenance equipment, to the Claydon & Barham Village Hall to carry out repair work on small areas of dampness and to the Henley Community Centre to purchase LED lighting for the football training pitch. The small amount of money that remained was clawed back into a district-wide pot of money to facilitate hardship support arising from the Covid pandemic. Your councillors anticipate having a similar amount of localities grant money available in 2021/22 and we will be welcoming new grant applications shortly.

District Council and Covid-19

The first Covid-19 lockdown started in March 2020 so the beginning of this council year, 2020/21, found the majority of the council's staff already working from home. A lot of effort and resources had been expended earlier to facilitate remote working and hot-desking as part of the council's move from Needham and Hadleigh to Endeavour House in Ipswich so much of the IT provision was in place, although upgrades were required to cope with expanded data volumes. After only a very brief hiatus, all council meetings, including Full Council, Cabinet, planning and licensing committees recommenced using Teams for remote access to 'virtual' meetings. Meetings were also recorded and they can be watched by the public either live or later viewing on Youtube. All these recordings remain available to view.

Many of the council staff were redeployed to assist and support the community throughout the Covid pandemic. Government made many millions of pounds available through a number of Covid grant schemes and all these were distributed via local district councils. In our case staff were reassigned to assist our Shared Revenues Partnership appraise and process applications for these multitude of grants.

Completion of CIFCO Portfolio

The final purchases of real estate investment to complete the £100million portfolio of properties within CIFCO, the jointly owned Babergh and Mid Suffolk company, were made as the year 2020/21 closed. Mid Suffolk's £50million share of the portfolio has been financed by fixed low interest long-term annuity loans. The Covid environment has thrown up some challenges but the diversity of portfolio, by tenant, geography and property use has ensured that even in such a worse-case scenario, rent collections have covered all monies due from CIFCO to the councils giving further confidence to this long-term income stream coming in from outside our district but being used for the benefit of our district and its residents.

Climate Change & Biodiversity

Following our council's declaration on climate change, made in common with many other UK councils, we have further extended its scope to encompass the equally important, wider aspects of biodiversity. An initial reserve of £500k to assist in the combat of climate change and to enhance biodiversity will be further augmented in 2021/22. We have also successfully obtained external grant funding to finance initiatives in this area.

Gateway 14

A hybrid planning application to cover both the original Gateway 14 site and the later purchased Stowmarket East site was submitted in January 2021 after extensive public consultation. The application should be heard by the planning committee in late May or early June. The site has recently benefitted from being included within the Haven Gateway 'Freeport East' designation.

YOUR DISTRICT COUNCILLORS in the Claydon & Barham Ward for the 2020/21 year under review are:-

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