

Great Blakenham.**£4 million for Council priorities:**

We are still to decide cross party how to deploy to best effect the four £1m funds set aside for council priorities.

The Green and Liberal Democrat Group would like to see a project to deliver zero-carbon housing to let at social rents. We believe that the Council should commission a recognisably Suffolk design that uses innovative techniques to deliver zero carbon at sensible cost. After it is proven it should be made available at low or zero cost to small-scale developers and self-builders.

We believe that up to a further £1m should be used to help our people improve the delivery of planning services and make the department the best in the region. Planning enforcement should be enhanced, so that conditions imposed on developers are followed up in full and enforcement moves from reactive to a positive, proactive role.

I would like to see examples of houses with challenging issues selected from our council housing. They should be converted to improve insulation levels and to use zero carbon heating, then the techniques used made available to help owners and landlords achieve such improvement.

Equalities

In early July I attended the Local Government Association virtual conference, a zero-cost way of finding what is concerning councils across the country and what they are doing. Covid recovery and planning were, as you would guess, major themes.

On Covid recovery and health equalities, ten years after his review, Professor Sir Michael Marmot went through the inequalities in the current situation. There has been a reduction in life expectancy in deprived areas and that is coupled to increased impact of Covid19. There is much to do to reduce these inequalities.

After Covid, it's vital to seize the opportunity presented by the need to rebuild the economy to Build Back Better and Fairer and that is a Mid Suffolk priority. One vital element in this is work that does not leave people scrabbling on the edge of poverty. Another is to reinstate services cut during austerity like children's centres.

Planning

The Government still appear set to shake up the planning system believing that it is the factor limiting housing delivery. The Local Government view is that the current system, particularly now with neighbourhood plans, is democratic and is delivering. It certainly is in Mid Suffolk with some 2000 houses planned in Gipping Valley.

The minister claimed he wanted planning system reform, not to rip up the existing system but improve it: simpler, faster, digital and with a commitment to net zero. The new system must have clear land allocations in the local and neighbourhood plans and a local design code.

A revised National Planning Policy Framework was issued on the 20th July together with the National Model Design Code: NMDC_Part_1_The_Coding_Process and NMDC_Part_2_Guidance_Notes. Since these are 75, 51 and 99 pages long I have not had time to do more than scan them and officers are busy finding what has changed.

There are significant problems: do design codes throttle innovation? Do we want automatic approval for houses to the local design code once our plan has defined the three planning areas the Government wants: growth, renewal, and protection? Communities need to retain the right to object to proposals.

Joint Local Plan examination

Hearing sessions for the Mid Suffolk and Babergh Joint Local Plan have been delayed. The online format needed during the COVID-19 pandemic was not fully inclusive.

Stage 1 sessions, originally scheduled for June and July, will now take place over a concentrated period from September, with Stage 2 hearing sessions in mid-Autumn as originally planned.

The hope is that this plan will be in place for a couple of years while we revise it to match the new government approach but at the moment the government is moving more quickly than we are. I fear we will be in for another period of policies that don't comply with the revised NPPF so are "Out of date" and can be ignored by developers.

Solar Farms

Of the three applications for 50MW solar farms which would dominate villages in our part of Mid Suffolk, ENSO is waiting determination, EDF and Greybarn are at Pre-app stage. A fourth solar farm is proposed at Palgrave and initial contact has been made for two more overhead line schemes ATNC and AENC. I have proposed that Councillors need an in detail briefing to understand the issues, particularly how to balance of the need to generate renewable energy with the impact of many acres of solar panels on residential amenity, wellbeing and agricultural production.

Recycling and Waste (Environment Bill) Consultation

The Government are proposing changes to the way we collect and re-cycle waste and the Resources and Waste Strategy (RAWS) element of the Environment Bill is currently out to a second and final round of consultation. The Suffolk Waste Partnership is determining a response and the District Council is contributing to that. The consultations cover a Deposit Return Scheme, Extended Producer Responsibility and Consistency across authorities. The objectives are less waste, the polluter pays, and 65% recycling.

Measures to improve the quantity and quality of household recycling are:

- Separate collection of 'core set' of dry recyclable waste
- Separate collection of food waste for recycling
- Separate collection of garden waste
- Statutory guidance and minimum service standards

There are major changes from the current Mid Suffolk situation with the possibility of a free garden waste collection and separate collection of food waste for anaerobic digestion.

Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy Refreshed

There has been substantial progress in the delivery of sports facilities across Babergh and Mid Suffolk. The refurbishment of Sudbury's Kingfisher Leisure Centre, £2.4m to modernise swimming facilities at Hadleigh Pool and £2.2m investment in Mid Suffolk's sports facilities including the recent upgrade and extension of Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre.

However, in recognition of the changing needs of the districts' residents the strategy has been reviewed and refreshed. This will ensure it remains relevant and enable increased participation in sport and physical activity, particularly from less active people experiencing greater health inequalities.

An independent audit found that the majority of parishes have at least one community building and many are already hosting Fit Villages and Yoga, fitness or dance classes. Both districts also benefit from a good supply of outdoor pitches and tennis courts, however some of these require upgrading and this has been addressed in the Priority Infrastructure Projects outlined in the strategy.

Locality Budgets

I am in contact with the Village Shop, the Tennis Club, The Duke of Marlborough and the Cinema Club at Great Blakenham but have yet to make decisions and complete the forms.

If you have queries, please phone me on 07756292320 or email me at: john.field@midsuffolk.gov.uk