

Walsham Le Willows Parish Council Meeting 14 Apr 2020 - District Councillor's Report

Mid Suffolk's response to the Covid-19 crisis

Babergh and Mid Suffolk's response to the Covid-19 crisis is now firmly established and working well, with Council staff working hard to ensure that Council processes still function, whilst also supporting the residents and businesses of Mid Suffolk. They are also starting to plan for the recovery so they are ready when the restrictions are lifted. The Tactical Management Team, chaired by Cassandra Clements, manages the Council's response to the crisis and there are two separate 'cells' covering support for Communities, chaired by Tom Barker, and for Business, chaired by Fiona Duhamel. All report into the Strategic Management Team, chaired by Kathy Nixon.

Changes To Our Customer Services In Response to Covid-19

The Council has put in place a number of measures to protect the public, their staff and restrict the spread of coronavirus, whilst doing everything possible to keep essential services running. This includes several closures until further notice:

- The Customer Access Point in Ipswich Street, Stowmarket has closed for 'face to face' enquiries and visits. Residents with council enquiries are now asked to go online wherever possible.
- Our play parks and open spaces - including Needham Lake. This will be done where possible by locking gates and putting up signage.
- Council managed public conveniences in Eye and Needham Lake.
- Leisure centres in Mid Suffolk: Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and Stradbroke Swimming Pool and Fitness Centre.

Amendments To The Planning Process

All planning applications, correspondence and payments should now be submitted electronically. The Planning team will continue to validate applications and expect to commence consultation, though this is likely to be incomplete at present. We understand that some Parishes have already put in place alternative virtual arrangements to respond to consultations and we will be reviewing all live Parish consultations with a view to agreeing a case by case approach with Parish Clerks.

The Planning team are reviewing all cases that would normally be reported to planning committees and are taking a case by case approach, giving priority to decision making on applications which will support the local economy, in line with advice from the Chief Planning Officer at CLG, to ensure that the planning system continues to function. The need for virtual committee meetings is currently being

discussed and information regarding future arrangements will be made available in due course. I am expecting to join a virtual Planning Control meeting before the end of April.

Protecting Our Tenants

The housing team have put in place measures to prevent the future eviction of any Council tenant who cannot pay their housing rent as a direct result of Covid-19. We've reduced our repairs services and are only carrying out essential repairs.

Supporting Our Communities

Communities are responding to this situation in some amazing ways. Town and Parish Councils often sit right at the heart of the local support systems that have emerged in response to this crisis and the District Council team recognise and value the incredible work they're doing.

Covid-19 Emerging Needs Grant

The Emerging Needs Grant allows groups and organisations to apply for up to £2,500 to cover increased costs incurred as a result of the Coronavirus (Covid-19), including:

- General running costs related to existing projects/activities
- Ongoing staff costs
- Volunteer expenses
- Utility bills
- The purchasing of food and other consumables

Applications do not require sign off from District Councillors and we are not implementing a closing date for receipt of forms, to ensure we can best respond to needs as these emerge.

Home, But Not Alone

The Tribe Volunteer app has recently been launched to connect people who need support during the pandemic with local volunteers. Please signpost those that approach you about volunteering to the app, as this allows for existing safeguarding processes to be adhered to. East of England Local Government Association have also published a safeguarding tutorial video for volunteers who may need to work within sensitive areas over the coming months.

Any vulnerable residents who have a genuine need for assistance with the delivery of groceries, medicines and other supplies should telephone freephone number **0800 876 6926**, which is open from 09:00 to 17:00, seven days a week.

Changes To Our Waste Services In Response To Covid-19

The Council is working hard to ensure waste collections continue but in order to do this they may have to collect some bins less frequently or stop some collections all together for a period of time. To this end the garden waste service has now been suspended. All garden waste should now be composted at home or stored until the service is operational again.

For the safety of others, including our crews, anyone self-isolating should double wrap their waste and store it securely for 72 hours, somewhere that cannot be accessed by the public. It can then be placed into the general rubbish bin for normal collection.

Support For Businesses

Businesses across Mid Suffolk are set to receive financial support in the form of grant funding announced in the Government's package of measures designed to help smaller businesses. The Council is responsible for payment of these grants to Mid Suffolk businesses and have put in place systems to manage this. All qualifying businesses are now being contacted. To date (8/4/20) 385 businesses in Mid Suffolk have received grant funding totalling over £4.7m.

Assistance For Key Workers

All council car parks will be free to park in until further notice, to support key workers. It is recognised that key workers may need to self-isolate at this time, so MSDC is leading work on behalf of the whole Suffolk system to help find short term accommodation for key workers who are unable to return home. Any key workers with an urgent need for this service should email accommodation@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk.

Fressingfield Neighbourhood Plan Adopted

Fressingfield has become the eighth area in the district to see their Neighbourhood Development Plan adopted as part of Mid Suffolk's Development Plan.

Budget Impact Of Current Crisis.

The impact on Council revenues as a result of the current crisis will be significant and although work has started to understand the damage caused by the current disruption it is too early to have a clear picture of the situation we will face once we return to something resembling normality. That said, MSDC has significant reserves in its General Account that will go some way to covering the likely revenue reduction expected over the year. However, these reserves are likely to be insufficient and, as yet, we have had no indication from central Government as to the level of support they will be willing to provide.

Covid-19 Key Messages

Attached for your information is a crib sheet of key messages and contact points issued to District Councillors. Please note that whilst the list was accurate when going to print the information it contains is likely to change over time, so please treat it with care.

Regards

Rick Meyer

Richard.meyer@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Tel: 07771703668