

# District Councillor Report: Andy Mellen – Bacton ward

(Bacton, Cotton, Finningham, Westhorpe and Wyverstone)

March 2025

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| <b>February Council meeting - annual budget</b> | <p>The Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC) meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February approved the council's annual budget for 2025/26. Details can be found here: <a href="#">(Public Pack)Agenda Document for Mid Suffolk Council, 27/02/2025 17:30</a></p> <p><b>No increase in Council Tax:</b> The council tax bill for a Band D property remains at £175.03. That works out under £3.37 a week to cover all district council services, including waste collection, licensing, planning, public realm and supporting the local economy, culture and communities. (Council Tax overall is expected to rise, however, as MSDC only sets and receives a small portion, with the bulk going to the County Council.)</p> <p><b>MSDC expects a budget surplus of £2.4m in 2025/26:</b> This is down from last year, due to factors including rising employee costs and costs for services, and the ending of the government's Rural Services Delivery Grant.</p> <p><b>Capital programme agreed:</b> The Council committed to a capital programme of £36.3m (£26m committed, with another £10m proposed 'capital ambition' projects), partly funded from reserves. This will deliver an ambitious pipeline of projects across the district.</p> <p>Among other things, expenditure includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- investment in sports and health facilities in Stowmarket and in Stradbroke</li><li>- major investment in the new Skills and Innovation Centre to upskill the District</li><li>- £1.5m fund to support High Street regeneration in our largest town, Stowmarket</li><li>- £300k per year funding pot for projects in other market towns and rural communities</li><li>- investment in cycling and walking infrastructure</li><li>- an increase in the Locality Award to £10,000 per Ward, giving an annual total of £340,000 in Locality grants to fund smaller projects around the District</li><li>- ongoing support for range of other grant schemes to fund community projects</li></ul> |
| <b>Local Government reform</b>                  | <p>As noted in the last report, the government has announced proposed major changes to the way local government is organised. This includes the creation of a new mayoral authority for Norfolk and Suffolk, and the combining of District and County Councils into unitary authorities.</p> <p>In January, Suffolk County Council voted to apply to the 'fast track' version of these changes. The government accepted this, resulting in the cancellation of the May 2025 County Council elections.</p> <p><b>Mayoral authorities – the government has opened a consultation until April 13<sup>th</sup>.</b> To share your views, see: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/norfolk-and-suffolk-devolution/norfolk-and-suffolk-devolution-consultation">https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/norfolk-and-suffolk-devolution/norfolk-and-suffolk-devolution-consultation</a></p> <p><b>Creation of unitaries:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Initial plans are to be sent to the government by 21st March 2025.</li><li>- MSDC is concerned about the lack of public consultation on this aspect of the reforms.</li><li>- An Extraordinary meeting of Mid Suffolk and Babergh Councils to discuss the issues was rescheduled from Feb 10<sup>th</sup> to April 10<sup>th</sup> to allow more time to review emerging details.</li></ul>   |

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| <p><b>Planning Policy updates</b></p>                | <p>As noted in the last report, the Joint Local Plan (JLP) for Babergh and Mid Suffolk is being reviewed, to make sure it stays compliant with the government’s increased new targets for housebuilding. The timeline for this work was approved at the February Council meeting. Further information can be found here: <a href="http://babergh-and-mid-suffolk-joint-local-plan-review">babergh-and-mid-suffolk-joint-local-plan-review</a></p> <p>The Cabinet member for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure, Cllr Andrew Stringer, has highlighted the importance of Neighbourhood Plans, which form part of the district’s local plans.</p>   |
| <p><b>EcoPower Suffolk: solar application</b></p>    | <p>EcoPower Suffolk (a subsidiary of Eenergy International Ltd) has announced plans for a 600 ha solar project: <a href="https://ecopowersuffolk.com/">https://ecopowersuffolk.com/</a></p> <p>The project includes parcels of land along the B1077 between Occold and Eye, as well as several other villages.</p> <p>Because of the project’s size, it is classified as a National Strategic Infrastructure Project (NSIP), and so the government (not the Local Authority) will decide if it goes ahead.</p> <p><b>The first consultation period will run from 10 March to 22 April 2025. For details see: <a href="#">Have Your Say   EcoPower Suffolk</a></b></p> <p>Mid Suffolk Council leader Cllr Andy Mellen and Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure, Cllr Andrew Stringer, have urged the government to take a more coordinated approach to such large-scale infrastructure projects in the District: <a href="#">Energy infrastructure ‘must be coordinated’ to minimise impact on Mid Suffolk communities - Mid Suffolk District Council - babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk.</a></p> |
| <p><b>Increased access in Stowmarket and Eye</b></p> | <p>From February, the council’s access point in the centre of Stowmarket is open 5 days a week – reverting back to pre-covid opening hours. Alongside this, MSDC is opening its first joint customer-access point at Eye Library, alongside Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice, starting 28th March. Staff from both organisations will be on hand to help residents between 9.15am and 12pm every Friday.</p> <p>Both these changes aim to make life easier for residents who prefer face-to-face contact. The Council can also be contacted about many issues by phone and through the website: <a href="http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk">www.midsuffolk.gov.uk</a> or phone <b>0300 123 4000</b></p>  |
| <p><b>Funding for community projects</b></p>         | <p>Details of Mid Suffolk Council’s community funding can be found at: <a href="http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk">www.midsuffolk.gov.uk</a> – click on the ‘Access community funding’ button.</p> <p>For advice or further information, please email the grants team at: <a href="mailto:BMSDCgrants@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk">BMSDCgrants@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk</a></p>  |

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