District Councillor Report November 2026

On the 22nd the MSDC meeting took place. The Leader was able to announce, with justified pride, the Social Housing Inspection had rated Mid Suffolk a 'C2' on a scale 1-4, this was the highest for any District Council in Suffolk. More improvement is needed, as was pointed out but that was known to the Council before the inspection.

Up to now, in Mid Suffolk and Babergh more than 2825 tonnes of food waste has been taken care of, out of the bins to be converted into biofertilizer.

After the Leader's Announcements the final recommendations re sizes of Parish Councils were presented and approved. Three Parishes had requested a decrease of the number of councillors and two had requested that they merge into one Parish Council. All due consultations had been carried out and these changes will come into force after the next elections. Locally it means that the size of Stradbroke Parish Council will henceforth comprise 11 Councillors instead of 13.

The following item consisted of a very thorny issue – the Constitutional Update of Planning Scheme Alterations'. In my previous report I mentioned that Councillor Stringer had pencilled a letter to Government, very critical of these changes and asking the Government to rethink. This time the Assembly was asked to pass on these very changes into the Constitution. We were told that if we would vote this down no lawful decisions could be made regarding planning, in my view serious arms twisting of elected Councillors. The new way of running Planning will consist of two 'schedules', one and two. 'One' means that any matter will be entirely decided by Officers, according to a list of criteria. It comprises developments of up to nine dwellings and other matters too. 'Reserved Matters' will no longer be dealt with in the Planning Committee but by Officers on their own. Schedule two applies to, among other things, developments of 10 or more abodes, Commercial applications exceeding 1000 square meters and, for some reason, tree preservation orders. Schedule 2 must also be determined by a Planning Officer unless the Chair of the Planning Committee and the Planning Officer agree that the issue be referred to the Planning Committee. Criteria for this will applied according to the 'Gateway Test'. This 'test' includes the phrase 'significance to the local area'. The meaning of that will depend upon the individual Officer. (I asked this question) If the two persons as per above disagree the final decision will rest with the Planning Officer. I also asked what happens to applications already well in the pipeline. The answer was that these will be entirely treated according to the new framework of regulations.

The gist of all this is a sharply decreased role and influence of elected Councillors and clearly decreased role of the Planning Committee. Councillors will as from the 31st of October no longer be entitled to 'call in' contentious applications to Committee. Reserved Matters will be out of reach for the Committee. These are, in my view, the most egregious novelties although there are other alterations too.

The debate that ensued was deeply disappointing. Everyone had supported the letter sent to government previously but now plenty of members explained how reluctant they were to vote in favour of altering the Constitution in spite of acknowledging how this excavates democracy. The fear was to see difficulties in passing planning matters in a lawful way. In the end only five members voted against this proposed change, Yours Truly one of them. I could not and cannot vote to hollow out democracy. This entire idea came from the Government and if people don't vote as wished for it should be for the government to sort it out, for instance by pulling this new idea. I may add that according to the Times four District Councils have voted against this fundamental change.

You may well all have seen in the local media news about a proposed solar farm project close to and around Eye. Eco Power is the name of the applicant. It would comprise 2200 acres of mostly arable

land. There was a meeting at the Eye Community Centre on the 28th of October, very well attended. 'Eye Action' is the group that organized this gathering. People are very upset about this. Both the Suffolk County Council and the Mid Suffolk District Council are clearly opposed to it. Anyone interested would be able to sign an on line petition on change.org htpps://c.org/LzbqrshF. Also people concerned could get in touch with Cllr Lucy Elkin or Sally Mittuch.

There has emerged, from the Council, a 'Retrofit Energy Advice for Communities and Household scheme', the 'REACH' programme. This is to provide information re home energy efficiency, available grants and so forth. There s a van that tours around with dedicated Officers, able to meet up with individuals and Community organisations. For further information, please go to the Mid Suffolk website and search for the REACH webpage.

Yours Sincerely,

Anders Linder