

West Suffolk Council Report

Like all other authorities West Suffolk Council is working to support communities through the Covid19 crisis.

Our locality and community officers are providing tremendous support for families and individuals who are struggling in lockdown with getting medication and food supplies. If you aware of anyone who is in difficulties, please put them in touch with me. Not all villages locally have the excellent support network we have in Stansfield. Late last week, residents in two nearby villages were in touch because they were desperately short of food.

WSC took the initiative and distributed the Government grant for community halls so that Stansfield Village Hall, along with other village halls in the area, has had a grant of £10,000. I also have contacted local Covid19 community support groups as I have some WSC locality budget to award to help them with their costs.

WSC like other district councils is struggling with its budget: Revenue has fallen - for example, car parking fees, which have been suspended, and rents, which have been put in abeyance, while spending increased with our efforts to secure accommodation for the homeless. The council has been largely successful in finding safe accommodation for the homeless although there has been a worrying return recently of nuisance behaviour and street drinking in Bury St Edmunds.

Civil Parking Enforcement came into effect early in April. It has been what's described as a soft launch with parking officers only issuing tickets to people whose illegal parking is obstructing roads.

Work is now going on at WSC to re-introduce the markets. The towns in the district have all had long histories of hosting markets. The council recognises that for people who live in town centres it will often be easier and cheaper for them to shop for essential food at the market than visit an out of town supermarket. However, the markets can only re-start if social distancing can be maintained. I am working with highways and WSC to re-introduce the monthly market in Clare.

County Lines activity has declined as during lockdown there has been a dramatic reduction in opportunities for drug dealers to make contact with users. However, they have adapted their operations and I gather some dealers are now making visits to users' homes by van and wearing Hi-Viz jackets, so they look like delivery drivers. Lockdown has led to a sharp reduction in street crimes such as mugging and in shoplifting and in turn this has led to audacious thefts and burglaries by people desperate to get money to fuel their habits.

Turning now to planning matters:

As you are aware, I set aside locality budget to fund a village meeting this spring, facilitated by Community Action Suffolk, so that residents could meet and discuss a vision for Stansfield. That proposal is obviously on hold.

As you are also aware, WSC had planned to go to public consultation this spring on the Issues and Options Local Plan proposals. That too is on hold and the hope is that this can be done in October.

The new Local Plan, for the period to 2040, will set out the WSC vision for the area. The elements of the issues and options consultation which I believe will be of most interest in Stansfield will be on

- A new settlement hierarchy
- Options for the distribution of growth

As I explained in previous parish meetings, regardless of any current planning applications, and regardless of any site submissions to the SHELAA, **planning policy will be set by the new Local Plan and that will determine, through its settlement hierarchy, where new homes are to be built. Homes will be allocated, in line with Government guidance, to sustainable communities. These are the communities with the existing services and the infrastructure to support residents.**

In the current plan, Vision 2031, the classification set villages such as Stansfield as infill villages allowing a very limited amount of new homes. However, the definition of infill set against the geography of Stansfield meant that since 2014 only one small site has met the requirements of infill – the land adjacent to Pump Cottage.

The proposals being looked at for the options and issues paper for the new Local Plan would redefine the settlement hierarchy from most to least sustainable as

Towns – locally Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill

Key Service Centre – locally Clare

Local Service Centre – locally Wickhambrook and Hundon

Type A Villages locally Stradishall

Type B villages – locally Stansfield

Countryside – locally Hawkedon and Denston

A Type A village would have a limited range of facilities and services, but which can meet some of the day to day needs of their residents and/or lie within 2Km of a town with the opportunity for sustainable access. The opportunity for site allocations in these villages will be explored through the Local Plan

A type B village would have very limited or no services and poor accessibility to public transport. These villages would have a settlement boundary, but NO sites would be allocated through the Local Plan

Countryside would be small rural settlements with no settlement boundary and no sites would be allocated.

The proposals would be the subject of the Issues and Options consultation and depending on the responses would be incorporated into the Local Plan. For a type B

village, the two routes to build new homes would be through the development of Neighbourhood Plan, which is a local project to bring growth – i.e. housing, into a community or through an application for an Exception Site.

I understand that there is interest in undertaking a Neighbourhood Plan in Stansfield. I helped Hargrave with their NP – which was the first to be completed in the former St Edmundsbury area. It is an arduous process and can be costly although there is some grant available.

I would be interested to know the aspirations for new housing of those residents keen to undertake an NP. Stansfield, in my view, could only support a limited level of development.

I have been in conversation with the planning officer now in charge of the Pippin Post Close application. As the parish council is aware it was withdrawn. I believe an amended application will be submitted.

Mary Evans

Ward Member Wickhambrook and Whepstead