

District Councillor report Lighthorne 11th January 2022

Stratford District Council and Warwick District Council Merger

Following the decision taken at a Full Council Meeting on December 13th, 2021, a formal submission document has now been sent to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove MP to request permission for a full political merger to create a South Warwickshire District Council. Assuming consent is granted, this will eventually bring to an end Stratford-on-Avon District Council after almost 50 years.

The vote had cross party support with 26 Councillors voting in favour with three opposed and two abstentions. There were many Councillors who had reservations but nevertheless, recognized that the balance of advantage lay with supporting the merger

The intended merger is not just about financial issues; there are some real opportunities to be gained from it. The new South Warwickshire District Council will have almost 300,000 residents. It will be one of the biggest District Councils in the country, larger than many current Unitary Councils. The experience elsewhere has been that this will provide a platform for a much stronger voice and for greater influence in important bodies. In our case, the obvious ones are Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise and the West Midlands Combined Authority and there will be a number of others. The intended merger will also give us a stronger voice and influence with Central Government. These may appear tangible benefits to many residents, but they really do matter, and they can make a real difference on major issues.

One very tangible benefit will be that the new Council will inherit a Housing Revenue Account. This means that we can build houses on our own account. This should help increase supply of affordable housing that is much needed.

Covid-19

Nationally the position in relation to number of cases of COVID have sharply increased and this is replicated in the Stratford-on-Avon District. On 29 December 2021 we had 392 positive tests across the district area, this is greater than the whole of March and April 2021 combined!

The current 7-day rate per 100,000 for the district is 1,551.3 (3-day lag), a month earlier the figure was 544.6. SDC currently has the lowest rate in the County, the highest rate being Nuneaton at 2,271.3. Unfortunately, there has also been a similar increase in the rates for the over 60s, the latest 7 day rate per

100,000 to the 31 December 2021 stood at 755.7, whereas a week earlier this figure was less than half this at 343.7.

However, there is good news in relation to the boosters/third vaccinations within the district. So far 88,807 such vaccinations have been delivered, the registrars mid-year estimate for the number of adults in the district is 107,521. This means that the vaccination rate in this age group is above 80%, this is one of the highest rates in the country.

Closer to home, there has been a Covid related death in Butlers Marston

In relation to the scheme that the Chancellor announced for businesses before Christmas to support the hospitality and leisure sectors in England with one-off grants of up to £6,000 per premise we have been informed that there will have to be a separate application process for this support. We will process these grants as soon as possible, the scheme will be open to applications until the end of February 2022 and the final payments will need to be made by 31 March 2022.

Core Strategy

Both Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils have committed to undertaking reviews (i.e. replacements) of their existing respective Core Strategy and Local Plan. The Stratford-on-Avon Core Strategy runs to 2031 and the Warwick District Local Plan runs to 2029. New plans are needed to plan for the development challenges beyond these dates and so a new South Warwickshire Local Plan is being prepared that covers both Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District areas. As a first stage in the Local Plan making process, a Scoping and Call for Sites consultation ran for 6 weeks from 10 May to 21 June 2021.

Call for sites' publication

A key element of the consultation was a 'call' for site suggestions for development and land use for consideration through the Local Plan process.

There have been 555 sites submitted, and all of these sites have been mapped and are available to view on our interactive map. Guidance on how to use this map, along with a static pdf version of the map (for those that prefer to view the sites in this format), are available on the [South Warwickshire Local Plan website](#).

The Call for Sites is simply a long list of sites that have been submitted to Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District councils for consideration through

the South Warwickshire Local Plan process. Publication of the Call for Sites is in no way an endorsement by either Council that the site is either suitable for development or will be included within the Local Plan itself.

The Councils are continuing to prepare the Local Plan and are undertaking various technical studies to inform the next stage of plan preparation: Issues and Options. This will include full public consultation and will be the opportunity for residents and stakeholders to have their say on the Council's initial assessment of the suitability or otherwise of the Call for Sites. The Issues and Options consultation will also consider what the strategy for meeting our development needs and managing development to 2050 may look like. Further rounds of public consultation will then follow.

The Call for Sites is an important part of plan-making, but crucially, only one part of the process. The suitability of sites for development and addressing infrastructure constraints are equally important.

The reality is that as the local planning authorities for South Warwickshire, we are obliged to prepare a Local Plan that meets our development needs and manages development proposals. Further sites for employment and housing are required. The Call for Sites is the starting point for that plan-making process.

Free webinar for residents on how to try a vegan diet

In 2019 the intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) produced a report “Climate Change and Land”, describing plant-based diets as a major opportunity for mitigating and adapting to climate change and included a policy recommendation to reduce meat consumption. Therefore, Stratford District Council and Warwick District Council are inviting residents to join a free webinar on Thursday 20th January 2022 with University of Warwick’s Vegetarian and Vegan Society on how to reduce your meat consumption as part of “Veganuary”. For more information visit: www.stratford.gov.uk/carbonconnected

Chris Mills
District Councillor