Lighthorne Parish Council – Full Council Meeting – 10 November 2026

District Councillor Report – Cllr Anne Parry - Wellesbourne North and Rural Ward

Planning Reforms

Elected councillors have now lost their say on the vast majority of planning decisions, as a result of the Government's new planning reforms which came into effect from 31st October, which has a huge impact on local democracy.

The National Scheme of Delegation for Planning Functions is a new legal framework that shifts most planning decisions to officers and sharply limits automatic committee referrals, including ward-member call-ins and objection thresholds.

The reforms introduce a national, uniform system for deciding which planning applications are handled by planning authority officers and which may go to committee.

Schedule 1: Applications That Must Be Decided by Officers – these include: Householder applications, minor commercial development, minor residential schemes (up to 9 dwellings on sites <0.5 ha), discharge of conditions, prior approvals, permission in principle, non-material amendments, biodiversity gain plans, certificates of lawfulness and most reserved matters applications. This means that these cases cannot be taken to committee simply because of objections or councillor requests.

Schedule 2: Applications That *May* Reach Committee

Schedule 2 covers wider categories, including: Larger residential or commercial applications, listed building consent, advertisement consent, tree preservation order consent, Section 73A retrospective applications, Section 106 modification/discharge decisions.

A Schedule 2 application can only go to committee if: The nominated officer and nominated member both agree to refer it, and at least one statutory gateway test is met:

- The proposal raises an economic, social or environmental issue of significance to the local area, or
- It raises a significant planning matter in relation to the development plan or other material considerations.

However, a referral is expected to be exceptional, not routine.

Own-Interest Applications

Applications submitted by: The authority itself, a councillor, an officer or cases where the authority or its members/officers have an interest may be referred to committee by

agreement between the nominated member and officer, but do not have to be; otherwise they are decided by officers.

In view of the above reforms, it will be interesting to see how this impacts on the planning committee, however SDC is being inundated with applications for new homes across the district from developers and land agents.

Local Government Reorganisation

Warwickshire continues to be one of 14 areas where proposals will be reviewed and paused while the Government considers whether the process is legally robust and aligned with its priorities.

The Government has also confirmed that councils with local elections scheduled for May 2027 will go ahead on existing council boundaries which means elections for North Warwickshire Borough Council, Rugby Borough Council, Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwick District Council will go ahead as planned. There are no County Council elections scheduled for next year.

Throughout this process, Stratford-on-Avon District Council's priority remains on delivering services for residents and supporting communities across the district and further information will be provided as and when it becomes available.

Scam Emails re Council Tax Refunds

Residents are being urged by SDC to remain vigilant after reports of scam emails claiming to offer Council Tax refunds.

The District Council has been made aware that some residents have received fraudulent emails stating that their Council Tax account has been credited and inviting them to click a link to arrange a refund. The messages typically claim that a credit has been applied to the recipient's account and include a link labelled "View Account Details".

Residents are advised that these emails are not from Stratford-on-Avon District Council and should be treated with caution. Follow the below steps:

- Do not click on links contained in unsolicited or suspicious emails.
- Do not provide personal, financial or banking information in response to these messages.
- Be wary of emails from unrecognised sources, particularly those claiming to offer refunds or requesting account information.

If Stratford-on-Avon District Council needs to contact residents regarding their Council Tax account, communications will be clear, specific and sent through official channels.

Anyone who is unsure whether correspondence is genuine should contact the District Council directly and quote their unique Council Tax reference number to verify their individual circumstances.

Solar Farm Update

It is understood that the construction process in respect of the Moreton Morrell/Lighthorne Solar farm will start in 2027. Uniper is now the sole owner and this follows the submission of plans by Innova which were granted planning permission by Stratford-on-Avon District Council in 2025.

Once energised the solar farm is expected to generate enough renewable electricity to power approximately 12,330 UK homes annually and will provide an annual community benefit which will be split 50/50 by Moreton Morrell and Lighthorne Parish Council and this is anticipated to be received in 2028.

New Taxi Licensing Policy

Stratford-on-Avon District Council is inviting residents, licensed drivers, private hire operators, businesses, partner organisations, and other interested parties to have their say on a proposed new Taxi Licensing Policy.

The 12-week consultation runs until 21 December 2026. Feedback received during the consultation will be considered before the final policy is presented for adoption through the Council's democratic process.

The proposed policy updates the Council's existing approach, which was introduced in 2009 and amended in 2013. It aims to improve standards for licensed drivers and vehicles, strengthen safeguarding and accessibility expectations, and provide clearer information for both the trade and the public.

Key proposals include clearer expectations for drivers and passengers, updated information on data protection and use of the National Register of Taxi and Private Hire Licence Revocation and Refusals database, guidance on accessibility duties and assistance dogs, regular safeguarding and disability awareness training, revised enforcement provisions, and a requirement for drivers to subscribe to the DBS Update Service.

The draft policy also proposes changes to vehicle age requirements for hackney carriage and private hire vehicles. Under the proposals, diesel, petrol and LPG vehicles

would be licensed until they reach 12 years of age, hybrid vehicles until they reach 15 years of age, and no vehicle age limit would apply to fully electric or hydrogen zero-emission vehicles with no exhaust emissions. The current minimum age requirement would also be removed.

Further information, including the draft policy and details of how to respond, is available on the Council's website – www.stratford.gov.uk

Ends

Cllr Anne Parry

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