

## WWPC Meeting – September 2021 District Councillor's Report

### South Warwickshire Council Consultation

An extensive public consultation is being launched on 6<sup>th</sup> September across both Stratford and Warwick District Council areas on proposals to create a South Warwickshire District Council.

Both Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils face a very uncertain financial future, although for slightly different reasons. Government funding for all Councils has reduced in recent years, and at Stratford-on-Avon yet further significant reductions are expected due to changes to the New Homes Bonus scheme this autumn, whereas at Warwick District the cost of delivering services, including refuse and recycling, is expected to increase significantly.

It is estimated that both Councils will have a shortfall of around £4-6m each year by 2025/26. Across the two Councils this means that £10m of annual savings are needed over the next five years to address this shortfall and help preserve services.

Faced with this financial pressure, and not wanting to see reductions in the current level of services, both Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils have been exploring a number of ways to work together to tackle this shortfall and reduce the impact on residents and service users.

Both Councils agreed the ambition to create a South Warwickshire Council earlier this year, and for this Council to be financially sustainable. **This consultation will help us understand whether you support this proposal.** Without the level of savings that could be expected through the creation of a South Warwickshire Council, there would be serious consequences on future service delivery.

The two Councils have similar sized budgets of approximately £17m. They serve similar sized populations, with a broadly similar net General Fund cost per head of population. They both serve a combination of towns and rural areas, with many challenges in common. There is a consistent geography already established for the South Warwickshire Community Safety Partnership, the Shakespeare's England Destination Management Organisation and the South Warwickshire Health Partnership. Residents of the South have consistent needs and concerns around areas such as rural transport, traffic and congestion and affordable housing.

During the last year both Councils have worked closely together on responding to the challenges from COVID. The pandemic has identified a lack of resilience in some service areas due to size of both authorities being relatively small. However, Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick have already started sharing services to address these resilience issues and from August this year the vast majority of Senior Management Team posts are shared.

The Councils believe that merely sharing some services does not make sufficient financial savings and still leaves considerable duplication. Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils are therefore considering a proposal to fully merge, in which case a new District Council would be established covering the whole of South Warwickshire, the areas currently covered by Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils.

**Questionnaires will be available online and in hard copy format and I will provide an update at the meeting and forward all the information on receipt and would encourage you as individuals and as a parish to take part in this extremely important consultation.**

### **South Warwickshire Local Plan**

Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils have commenced the initial stages in the development of a Local Plan and have undertaken a Scoping and Call for Sites consultation, which closed in June and has generated the submission of over 500 sites which are currently being reviewed by the joint policy team. This is the first stage in a long process and the consultation asked a series of questions about what issues the new Local Plan should cover and sought views on how we should tackle these issues.

### **Business Grants**

Throughout the pandemic local government has been responsible for the administration and payment of the various and numerous Central Government Grant Schemes. To date SDC has paid out over £70 million in grant funding and it is great news that the village hall has been able to benefit from these grants over the last 18 months.

SDC has worked closely with Coventry and Warwickshire LEP Growth Hub to ensure that payments of grants have reached those in most need. SDC has subsequently received a further indicative funding of £1.4 million from July which was only available to those local authorities who had spent their original allocation. This new tranche will consequently be used to support existing businesses to flourish post-pandemic.

### **Planning and Enforcement**

The planning teams continue to be swamped by householder applications for extensions which reflects the increase of homeworking during Covid and the new hybrid model of working that is being adopted by many businesses to look at greater flexibility of working routines amongst staff combining a mix of office based with home working routines. Whilst applications have recently been taking 5 weeks to be validated this has now reduced to around 2 – 3 weeks despite the volume and staff shortages within the planning team.

### **Local Enforcement**

The Council has recently reviewed its existing Local Enforcement Plan with a view to better targeting the investigation resources at the most serious issues. This was put out to consultation and the further information can be found by visiting: [Draft Local Enforcement Plan Consultation | Stratford-on-Avon District Council](#)

### **Recycling**

SDC is working hard to negotiate a revised contract for recycling waste across the district following the fire at Pure in July for the next 18-24 months until the new facility at Coventry is built and up and running. The cost implications of this interim service are significant.

**Anne Parry**

31 August 2021