

Stratford on Avon District Councillor's Monthly Report for May 2024

Mike Rice, Liberal Democrat District Councillor for Henley-in-Arden

Contact: mike.rice@stratford-dc.gov.uk; mike.rice4henley@outlook.com

A year in Henley-in-Arden

Doesn't time fly?! A year has passed since I was elected to be the District Councillor for Beaudesert and Henley-in-Arden, the first Liberal Democrat for many years to have that honour and only the second in some decades.

The most important event over the past 12 months has been the Neighbourhood Development Plan finally reaching the local referendum stage. This is the last hurdle before the referendum result is ratified by the District Council and the Plan comes into force.

The JPC is to be congratulated for its hard work and perseverance in getting the Plan to fruition after more than a decade in the making. I have done what I can at the District Council to try to smooth its passage, but my efforts are as nothing compared to the determination of the JPC to see it through. The residents of Henley should be very grateful.

The Plan makes a valuable contribution to the sustainable development of the community by supporting Henley's local economy, protecting the character and heritage of the area, and promoting community facilities and services. Please make sure you vote in favour of it – in person or by post – on 30th May.

On 24th May last year, I was one of 25 Liberal Democrats who took their places on Stratford-on-Avon District Council, an overwhelming majority after a landslide victory for the Liberal Democrats in the District.

A great deal has been achieved over the past year from a standing start.

The District Council has adopted a new Council Plan; passed a prudent, but ambitious budget for initiating changes; funded 37 community projects; created a £100,000 Community Climate Change fund for parish councils, community and charity groups to undertake green initiatives, such as installing solar panels; and approved a new South Warwickshire Economic Development Strategy.

Keen to make improvements from the start after more than 20 years in opposition, the Liberal Democrats initiated two Peer Reviews by the Local Government Association (LGA). These have looked at the planning process and how the District Council works as a whole. Two separate LGA Peer Review teams have now looked at what the Council does well – and what it does not – and what it could learn from other Councils.

A key decision was the new Council Plan. After consultation with residents, local businesses, parish and town councils, voluntary groups and service partners, the Council Plan for 2023-27 sets high ambitions for the Council in supporting the health and wellbeing of our residents, protecting our environment and delivering sustainability and innovation.

Decisions have been taken on many projects including safeguarding the Stratford Shopmobility service, maintaining UBUS assistance across the District, investing in more Rural Crime Advisers and initiating a more environmentally-friendly grounds maintenance contract.

Funds from development have provided over £2million to support community centres, the new diagnostic centre at Stratford Hospital and public open spaces.

Going forward, the Council has changed the way it allocates public funds. It has moved from a bid-centred to an evidence-led process better to target money at providing infrastructure, such as roads, doctors' surgeries, community centres and other amenities. The new approach will also fall more closely into line with the emerging South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP) to determine how the District develops up to 2050.

Energy efficiency of council buildings is being improved, firstly by installing rooftop solar panels at Stratford Leisure Centre. This follows a successful £283,000 bid for government money to install photovoltaic (PV) panels to reduce the centre's energy bills and carbon emissions.

Finally, the residents of Henley and other parts of the District can be proud that they have been recognised as some of the best recyclers in the country. The District Council is now fifth in the top ten local authorities for reuse, recycling and composting, with a recycling rate of 60.0%.