

District Councillor Report Gislingham Ward: Wickham Skeith, Thornham Magna, Gislingham, Wortham and Burgate, Mellis. May 2020

Covid-19	Due to the Covid-19 emergency, from 23 March 2020, all Council meetings were cancelled and Council staff began working from home where possible. Many staff have been seconded to different service areas and some of the routine work has been paused for the time being. MSDC have so far received £1.069M in grants from Central Government to assist towards extra costs and reduced income.
Meetings	Since the lockdown there were no formal District Council meetings until a planning committee meeting was held on Tuesday 28th April with members and officers using Skype facilities from their homes. The May Cabinet meeting will be held using Skype and more and more meetings are being set up. Where possible task groups and informal meetings are continuing to try to move forward as much council business as possible.
Decision Making	Under delegated powers, as augmented by government legislation, some key decisions have been made by the Chief Executive. Most significant are the approval of Section 106 conditions regarding the Snoasis development and amendments to our statement of community involvement which means no site notices for planning applications. The majority of planning decisions are now delegated to the Chief Planning Officer. Ward members are able to provide information and advice which is taken into account as decisions are taken.
Council Developments	Where MSDC have works in progress, these have been suspended for the present. There are no proposals to commence any other site works for the time being.
Garden Waste	Collection of brown bins was halted for a while but is set to start up again during the week commencing 11 May in some areas; week commencing 18 May in others. Details are on the MSDC website.
Small Business Grants	We have been encouraging businesses and other organisations who have not already done so to apply for a grant to help them through this difficult time. If you run a business or know someone who does and may not have applied, please get in touch with us or go to the MSDC website where there are details and an on-line application form.
Emergency Needs Grants	MSDC has funds to support organisations providing help to vulnerable residents. There are details on line, or contact one of us.
Homelessness	Staff have been extremely busy in housing all rough sleepers, and also sofa surfers, in order to reduce risk of virus transmission. They have been accommodated in hotels booked by the District Councils. A total of 27 individuals within the two districts were accommodated initially. Numbers may increase, including people who suffer a relationship breakdown or are homeless following release from prison.
Housing	Council houses falling vacant are not being inspected or repaired for reletting as moving house is discouraged by government at present.
Locality Awards	Locality Awards have been launched for 2020/21, along very similar lines to previous years. We have contacted a number of organisations within the parish, including a number which did not apply last year. If you know of a community group in need of some funding please put them in touch with us.
Help line	Staff are continuing to run the helpline - 0800 876 6926 - and this is receiving several hundred calls a day.

Councillor: Rowland Warboys