

News from Stratford District Council

This month, District Councillor **Trevor Russel** reports on SDC support for the town's youngsters and a new SDC rural cinema scheme, updates on the Vision for Stour – and of course, addresses the floods aftermath.

Boost for youngsters

Shipston youngsters will benefit from a £200,000 lottery grant to SDC to implement a new play strategy. It's good news too for parents – providing more activities for teenagers is among local residents' top priorities.

The money will be used to deliver a range of activities for young people aged between 11 and 19. These include a mobile skate park, an outreach programme of play rangers to work with youngsters and improving existing play areas as well as providing new ones.

The strategy is being targeted at the eight most deprived wards in the District, which include Shipston – although details of activities in the town have still to be finalised.

SDC itself has spent £200,000 in the past three years on providing and supporting parish councils and community groups to provide facilities and activities. The LibbyLou play area and the new skate-park have both received big grants from SDC.

Coming to a cinema near us

There's more good news for the town. Shipston will be one of the venues for SDC's new 'Moving Pictures' rural cinema scheme designed to bring the latest and best films to communities across the district.

The Council has been given £15,000 in external funding to organise about 200 screenings a year, attracting – it is hoped – around 6,000 people. Shipston will have one screening a month, on a Friday evening, run by the Lions at the High School.

SDC will pay for the equipment, film hire and publicity, which will ease the burden on organisations currently running film shows. Organisers will pay a small admin fee to SDC but will be able to keep what they take on the door.

Full ahead on the Vision

An action plan for the Vision for Stour – the blueprint for shaping the future of the town and surrounding villages over the next 15 years – has been drawn up, and now looks set to win SDC approval before the end of the year.

It's a comprehensive plan – addressing all the priority areas identified by residents during an extensive consultation last year.

There is an emphasis on actions to boost employment opportunities, including creating new businesses, improving the local workforce's skills and providing more employment sites, as well as attracting more visitors to help retailers.

The plan also includes steps to improve community facilities, provide more affordable housing for local people, reduce crime levels and the fear of crime, and develop better local transport links.

It will be reviewed by a group of key councillors at the end of August and adopted by SDC towards the end of this year.

Après the deluge

The inquest into the various authorities' response to last month's floods continues – as will the debate about what should be done to prevent any recurrence, or at least minimise the impact if there is a repeat.

Attention is focused mainly on the Environment Agency and Severn Trent and what they intend to do to tackle the problems with the River Stour and drainage issues in the town. But SDC is looking at its emergency planning procedures and is working with the town and county councils and other agencies on improving them.

Of course, none of this should distract us from the plight of those residents and businesses in the town who have suffered a terrible time – some forced to leave their homes or close their businesses for what could be several months. The costs run into hundreds of thousands of pounds.

As I write, SDC has identified 21 residential properties affected in Shipston. This compares with 154 in Alcester, 136 in Wellesbourne, 54 in Bidford, seven in Henley. There were four in Brailes and Tredington, and two in Long Compton and Little Compton.

SDC has agreed to give all householders affected by the floods a grant of £250. The money comes from the £600,000 flood relief fund awarded by the government to the Council. The assumption is that about 2,000 properties district-wide will claim and qualify for support (there is a definition of 'flooded'), so we are allocating £500,000 for direct help to affected householders.

The Council is using £50,000 to cover the costs of collecting damaged items and the remaining £50,000 is being held as a contingency fund in case the number of residential claims exceeds 2,000.

SDC has so far also identified 14 affected businesses in Shipston – although the number is almost certainly higher – out of 50 in the district, easily the highest number for any town or village.

The Council's Executive was told that the £600,000 government grant was ring-fenced for householders, and could not be used to help businesses – which tied our hands. But I appreciate this has upset the business community locally.

SDC is expecting further government support, and hopefully at least some of this will go to businesses. If not, I'll be pressing my colleagues on the Executive to dip into SDC's reserves to provide them with some help in the interests of fairness and equity for *everyone* affected by the floods.