

Stratford on Avon District Councillor's Monthly Report
Mike Rice, Liberal Democrat Councillor for Henley-in-Arden
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Winter warmth grants now available

New funding options are available to Henley residents from the District Council to help them keep their homes warm and reduce the cost of their energy bills.

There are three schemes. The first is a government-funded scheme, HUG2 – Home Upgrade Grant, phase 2 – which is designed specifically to tackle cold and damp homes that are not connected to the mains gas heating network.

The other two, the Energy Support Fund (ESF) and Physical Intervention Fund (PIF), are funded by the District Council.

The District Council has teamed up with local energy experts Act on Energy to help administer the three schemes, which all have different eligibility criteria. These are listed on the District Council's website at www.stratford.gov.uk/people-communities/green-home-grants.cfm.

Residents may apply for any of the funding schemes or find out more about eligibility criteria on the Act on Energy website at: www.actonenergy.org.uk. Act on Energy may be contacted directly by phone 0800 988 2881 or by email at advice@actonenergy.org.uk.

Residents are eligible for HUG2 if they don't have gas central heating; have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of D, E, F or G; and have a combined annual household income under £31,000 (gross).

The government has deemed that certain postcodes automatically meet the income eligibility criteria. This means that off gas grid and EPC D-G homes in these postcode areas are automatically eligible for the Home Upgrade Grant.

For Stratford on Avon District, these postcodes are in Alcester East and Alcester West wards. Not all postcodes in these wards are included.

Meanwhile, ESF has been set up to offer financial support this winter for vulnerable households within the district who are struggling to pay their energy bills. This support consists of a one-off payment of £500 (for households with children) or £300 (for households without children). This payment is made directly to the energy provider.

PIF is a programme to assist individuals and households experiencing hardship through significant increases in the cost of living. The scheme aims to support vulnerable households by paying for works to repair, supplement and/or improve domestic heating systems. Households can apply for works up to a limit of £6,000.

These new funding schemes complement the existing Energy Company Obligation funding, known as ECO4, which is a requirement for energy suppliers to help households reduce the costs of their home heating by fitting energy-saving measures.

Consultation, consultation, consultation

We seem to have entered the season for consultations with Stratford District Council (SDC) releasing quite a few documents for comment recently. Here is a selection of the most relevant for Henley.

Neighbourhood Development Plan

The most important of the consultations is the Henley-in-Arden Neighbourhood Development Plan, which was opened up by the District Council for consultation on Thursday, 12th October, definitely a red-letter day for the town.

The long and seemingly endless Plan-making process is finally coming to a climax. The people of Henley now have a chance officially to comment on the Plan, which establishes a vision for the future of Henley and lays down planning policies as well as proposals for the future development and use of land in the area

After more than a decade to get to this stage, and thanks to the tremendous efforts of the Joint Parish Council (JPC), local residents have finally been given the opportunity to express their views to SDC and the independent Examiner.

Local residents, businesses and organisations have been given six weeks to comment to SDC on the Plan. It's SDC's job to bring together the comments received and pass them onto the independent Examiner. The Examiner then decides whether the Plan is fit and proper, and ready to proceed to the final stage, namely the local Referendum.

The consultation will run until Friday, 24th November 2023. Please comment to SDC at www.stratford.gov.uk/henleynp.

Barring any unforeseen circumstances – and there have been many in the past – the latest Plan could be 'made' or formally adopted early in the New Year, provided it gets the support of Henley residents in the Referendum.

When it is in place, the Plan must be given significant consideration by the District Council when decisions are made on planning applications within the Henley area. Without it, Henley could be swamped with new housing popping up all around the town.

District Council Plan

The closing date for comments on the draft District Council Plan was Friday, 20th October. The JPC responded on behalf of the townspeople of Henley-in-Arden. The Plan is due to run for the next four years and covers seven core areas: Residents and Communities; Delivery of Service; Climate Change; Health and Wellbeing; Housing; and the Local Economy.

Gateway Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document

This was covered in last month's District Councillor's report, which anticipated that the draft document would be released for public comment by a decision at the full Council meeting on Monday, 16th October.

Located to the north-west of Stratford town centre and bounded by Birmingham Road to the north-east, Arden Street to the north-west and Windsor Street to the south-east, the Gateway site will be the location of a proposed World Shakespeare Centre, celebrating the life and work of William Shakespeare.

This Centre will be the centrepiece of the site, which will be regenerated "in a way that benefits the wider district and region". In particular, the new Gateway should improve northern access from Henley, for example, into the town centre.

The consultation period on the Supplementary Planning Document is from Thursday, 19th October until Friday, 1st December. Comments are invited on any aspect of the document. It can be viewed on the District Council's website at: www.stratford.gov.uk/gatewayspd.

Revised Statement of Community Involvement and Polling Stations Review

The first of these two consultations, concerning every aspect of planning, closed on Friday, 3rd November. Principally designed to remove special Covid measures, the revision also gave parish councils and residents the opportunity to comment more generally on the planning process within the district.

No changes to Henley-in-Arden's polling station arrangements at the Memorial Hall were proposed by the review, which has now closed for consultation.