

Ufton Parish Council – April 7th 2026

District Councillor Report – Susan Ostrander

Headlines:

1. New Stratford DC website
2. Growing opportunities plan
3. Operation Recall and new legislation
4. Stratford DC is the TOP recycling District nationally!
5. Second homes council tax update
6. By-election: Bishops Itchington, Fenny Compton and Napton

1. New website for Stratford District Council

Stratford District Council has approved a new Digital Strategy and, following feedback from the Residents' Survey, has undertaken a full redesign of its website and online services, which are now live.

The new website has been developed to make it easier for residents, businesses and visitors to find information and access services quickly and confidently. The design is based on a range of evidence, including survey feedback, website usage data, and user testing, to reflect how people interact with Council services.

The website now features simpler navigation, improved accessibility, and a more modern, mobile-friendly design. It also provides clearer pathways to commonly used services and reduces the number of steps needed to complete key tasks. In addition, the Council's newsroom has been refreshed to provide clearer and more up-to-date information.

The new website can be accessed at: www.stratford.gov.uk

2. Growing Opportunities Plan

As District Councillor, I am pleased to report the launch of the *Growing Opportunities Plan 2026–2029*. This sets out a clear strategy for tackling poverty, improving health and wellbeing, and creating opportunities for residents across the District over the coming years.

While Stratford-on-Avon District is often seen as relatively affluent, the plan highlights that this can mask significant pockets of need, particularly in our rural communities. Challenges such as fuel poverty, access to services, and the rising cost of living continue to affect many households locally.

The plan has been developed in partnership with the Social Inclusion Partnership, which brings together over 25 organisations including Citizens Advice, local foodbanks, health services and community groups. This collaborative approach is intended to ensure that support is well coordinated and reaches those who need it most. Seven key “missions” underpin the plan. Of relevance to our area is the focus on rural inequalities, recognising the difficulties many residents face in accessing essential services without reliable transport. Work will continue to review and support options such as demand-responsive transport to help keep our villages connected.

The plan also prioritises tackling fuel poverty, which affects around 15% of households in the District—higher than the national average. This is largely due to the age and nature of rural housing, particularly properties that are not connected to the gas network. Measures will focus on improving energy efficiency and supporting residents with rising energy costs.

Supporting young people is another key priority, with a focus on reducing child poverty, improving educational outcomes, and expanding access to youth activities and mental health support. Alongside this, the plan seeks to improve overall health outcomes, recognising that life expectancy can vary significantly across different parts of the District.

More broadly, the plan responds to ongoing cost-of-living pressures, with data showing increasing reliance on support such as Universal Credit and foodbanks, including among working households. It aims to address these issues through a stronger focus on prevention, early intervention, and joined-up local services. This work builds on progress already made, including securing over £1 million in funding for the voluntary sector since 2023.

Overall, the plan represents a long-term commitment to ensuring that all residents—wherever they live—are able to share in the District’s prosperity, with particular attention given to those facing the greatest challenges.

Further details, including the full plan and action plan, are available on the District Council website: [Stratford Growing Opportunities Plan 2026 2029 .pdf](#)

3. Operation Recall – including new legislation

Stratford-on-Avon District Council’s Rural Crime Advisors are supporting Operation Recall, a national initiative led by Warwickshire Police to raise awareness of livestock worrying.

At this time of year, pregnant ewes and young lambs are particularly vulnerable, and incidents tend to increase. Attacks by dogs can cause serious injury or death to animals and have a significant impact on farmers.

The District Council team is continuing its work across South Warwickshire, visiting rural areas where incidents have occurred, speaking with dog walkers and promoting responsible dog ownership, including the importance of keeping dogs on leads near livestock.

Livestock worrying is a criminal offence under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953. Members may wish to note that new legislation, the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Act 2025, comes into force on 18 March 2026 and significantly strengthens these powers. Changes include the introduction of unlimited fines, enhanced police powers to seize dogs, an expanded definition of livestock worrying (including incidents on roads and paths), and wider protection for animals such as llamas and alpacas. These changes are intended to provide stronger protection for livestock and support farming communities.

Parish Councils and residents can request visits, advice or leaflets from the Rural Crime Advisors by emailing community.safety@stratford-dc.gov.uk or completing the online form:

<https://www.stratford.gov.uk/online-forms/rural-crime-advisor-enquiry.cfm>

Farmers can also request 'Dog on Lead' signs by emailing ruralcrimeteam@warwickshire.police.uk.

4. Recycling Success Across Stratford-on-Avon

I am very pleased to report that Stratford-on-Avon District achieved the highest household recycling rate in England for 2024/25, according to figures recently published by Defra.

The District recorded a recycling rate of 63.9%, representing an increase of 2.9% on the previous year and moving us up to first place nationally. This is an excellent achievement and reflects the strong commitment of residents across the District to recycling and reducing waste.

This success is also supported by the continued partnership between the District Council, its waste contractor (Biffa), and the recycling facility (Sherbourne) where materials are processed. Ongoing improvements to recycling infrastructure mean that the service can continue to adapt and remain effective in the future.

The national top ten rankings are set out below:

Rank	Authority	Recycling rate for 2024/25
1	Stratford-on-Avon District Council	63.9%
2	Milton Keynes Council	63.2%
3	South Oxfordshire District Council	61.3%
4	Three Rivers District Council	61.1%
5	East Riding District Council	61.0%
6	East Devon District Council	60.3%
7	Dorset Council	60.2%
8	North Somerset	60.2%

Rank	Authority	Recycling rate for 2024/25
9	Stockport MBC	60.1%
10	St Albans City and District Council	60.0%

Residents are encouraged to continue their excellent efforts. Further information on what can be recycled, including additional items collected locally, is available via the District Council website and app:

<https://www.stratford.gov.uk/waste-recycling/recycling-collections.cfm>

5. Council Tax Premium on Second Homes

I would like to update the Parish Council on a recent decision by Stratford-on-Avon District Council to introduce a council tax premium on second homes from 1 April 2027. This follows changes in national legislation which allow councils to apply an additional charge of up to 100% on properties that are furnished but are not used as a main residence.

There are currently over 850 second homes across the District, representing just over 1% of the total housing stock. The introduction of this premium is intended to encourage some of these properties back into full-time residential use, helping to increase the availability of housing for local people.

Improving access to affordable housing remains a key priority for the District Council, and this measure forms part of a wider commitment to supporting sustainable communities and making best use of existing housing.

A formal consultation on the proposal took place between December 2025 and February 2026, with responses received from residents, stakeholders and second-home owners. All affected owners have been contacted directly, and further information has been made publicly available.

Those impacted by the change will receive written notification in advance, and the District Council will be offering advice sessions to help residents understand how the new arrangements may affect them, including any exemptions that may apply. The premium will come into effect from April 2027, in line with the requirement to provide at least one year's notice.

6. By Election - BIFCAN:

Many of you will recall Cllr Nigel Rock (Lib Dem) who preceded me as the District Councillor for some parts of this ward. Sadly, after over 20 years as a very dedicated and caring District Councillor in this area, Nigel has decided that for health and family reasons he must step down. This has triggered a by-election in the Ward of BIFCAN (Bishops Itchington, Fenny Compton and Napton) which will take place on 7th May

2026. This is a two-person ward, and the other District Councillor is Natalie Gist (Lib Dem).

I will be very sorry to see him go as he has been a great friend and mentor.