

DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE 2016 PARISH ANNUAL MEETINGS IN THE CLAYDON & BARHAM WARD

ELECTION 2015

The 2015-16 Council year (April-March) started with the period of 'purdah' leading up to the May 7th election. This is a quiet period for the Council meetings but a busy time for all prospective candidates. At the election the Conservative and Independent Group consolidated their position at Mid Suffolk, winning 31 of the 40 council seats including both seats in the Claydon & Barham Ward. In total there were sixteen new councillors, so a lot of new faces and the early months involved a significant training exercise. Our sister council, Babergh District Council, also came under Conservative control at the 2015 election. This is the first time it has not been 'under no overall control' since that council was created in the 1974 reorganisation.

ORGANISATIONAL & FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

Following the election, the two new administrations decided to review the Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) produced in 2014 and update the strategies of the two Councils. This was a 'refresh', rather than a total re-write. This plan, for the period 2016-20 will be submitted for final approval at this April's Full Council meetings. The JSP sets out how the Councils aim to provide services to deliver positive, sustainable change in our individual and business communities over the next five years. The last few months of 2015-16 has also seen a focused management review undertaken to ensure we make the best use of our resources in securing the delivery of our new Strategic Plan.

With the on-going decline in core funding from Central Government, Mid Suffolk has continued to increase its part of the council tax through modest increases of less than 2%. In July 2015 both Councils approved a plan to invest the Councils' cash and capital resources to generate revenue income whilst achieving an increase in capital value in the longer term and stimulate local economic growth.

In the late Summer of 2015 devolution came onto the agenda with the various district councils of Suffolk, along with the County Council engaging in preliminary discussions with Central Government over a devolution settlement. The initial aim was to have something agreed in principle by the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. However, these proposals were not regarded as sufficiently ambitious with just Suffolk alone and discussions commenced with Norfolk. Subsequently the message coming from Central Government was the need for an East Anglian wide devolution proposal. Following weeks of further negotiation between Government, local councils and the LEPs, a deal worth over £1billion for East Anglia was announced in Chancellor's 16th March budget. The Deal, which sets out a fundamentally different relationship between Government and local public services was negotiated by Leaders from councils across Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the three LEPs covering that region. It not however yet a 'done deal' as it requires ratification by each of the local councils and the LEP boards. The Deal will see the creation of a Combined Authority and directly elected Mayor with the first mayoral elections scheduled for May 2017.

HOUSING

During the year planning consent was granted to build 38 new council homes with support from the Homes and Communities Agency grant funding. These are the first council houses to be built in a generation and will be completed by the end of 2016/17. The Council is using its Right to Buy receipts to acquire four properties with a further six in the pipeline. A revised tenancy agreement was approved in 2015 for Mid Suffolk's council tenants which in many cases for new tenancies will remove the previous 'tenancies for life' arrangements. The private sector housing team has worked hard to return private empty homes to occupation and that work has now been expanded to include commercial buildings. The roll-out of solar PV installations on 2,000 council houses was completed by early 2017 before renewable subsidies were reduced.

GROWTH/BUSINESS/PLANNING

In January 2016 both Councils voted to adopt the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which provides a fixed and certain monetary obligation on developers to fund infrastructure. Planning permissions granted after April 11th 2016 will be liable under the new CIL regime.

In November the Chancellor announced that Mid Suffolk had secured one of the Government's prestigious Enterprise Zones in Stowmarket. This at the Mill Lane Business Park and also includes the Gipping Food Enterprise Zone.

Mid Suffolk and Babergh presently have two separate Local Plans. We are now in the process of developing a Joint Local Plan. Detailed conversations have started with Councillors at 'cluster meetings' on how district wide housing targets may resonate at a local level. This includes the impact on growth on infrastructure, facilities and service improvement opportunities. Wider public consultation and parish liaison will be undertaken in 2016.

The Development Management team has been changed and now comprise three officer teams to serve specific areas of Mid Suffolk and Babergh. Over time these teams will establish improved local connections with the areas they cover. This is the first step of a number of planned improvements in Planning to ensure clear routes of communication for consultees, parish councils, residents and developers.

YOUR DISTRICT COUNCILLORS are:-

James Caston : 07789957444 or james.caston@midsuffolk.gov.uk

John Whitehead : 01473 833279 or john.whitehead@midsuffolk.gov.uk