

Hawstead Report for the Annual Parish Meeting.

Another year has gone and I have now been a Councillor for 3 years. I am still thoroughly enjoying the work involved and have been pleased to offer help and advice to a number of Hawstead residents.

My participation in council activities remains wide ranging. I am currently vice chair of the Development Control and site inspections committee and chair of the Grant Panel. I am a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Rural Area Working Party, the West Suffolk Joint Growth Steering Group, West Suffolk Joint Staff Consultative Panel and I am a sub for the Mayoral Advisory and the Standards Committee. I have also been actively involved in the drawing up of the joint housing strategy with FH. I continue to attend training and briefing sessions in order to keep up to date with what is going on both in SEBC and in local government generally.

Shared Services with Forest Heath. This has again been the big on-going development this year in our endeavour to continue to save money whilst at the same time striving for increased efficiency.

We remain 2 separate councils with separate budgets, but we are working together to build common strategies for the way forward.

A single pay structure for employees is now operating across both Councils.

We continue to look to becoming more commercial in the services we offer in the community. We are currently reorganising work areas in WSH in order to bring more services into the building and thus enabling closer contact with providers and at the same time, saving money in renting space elsewhere.

Council tax has not been raised for the fourth year running which qualified us for a government grant of just under £300,000. The only problem is that by not raising the tax, we are not keeping in line with inflation, which will have an affect in the future. However, if inflation continues to fall, this will be a help.

As the income from central government continues to decrease, we continue to look for **new sources of income**. SEBC is a member of both the New Anglia and the Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership. These groups have control of large sums of money and SEBC is working to ensure that we get our fair share of funding in order to plan and deliver jobs and economic growth in St Edmundsbury.

SEBC has also benefited from the New Homes Bonus which is a grant paid by central government for increasing the number of homes built and the number of empty homes brought back into use. There is also an extra payment for building Affordable Homes. We have been awarded nearly £900,000 for each of the next 6 years under this scheme.

Jobs and growth are closely linked to the **provision of homes for our communities**. As part of this process we intend to build new and affordable homes for our communities, which are flexible to meet people's changing needs, together with the necessary infrastructure to support them.

Vision 2031 is now in the final stages of consultation having been examined by the Independent Inspector earlier this year. It is hoped that it will be adopted later in the summer and will complement our vision and protection for SEBC for the next 25 years.

Families and Community Strategy. Each ward now has a Locality Officer. Gemma O'Shea is the officer for Chedburgh Ward and she has already met with your Parish Council. She will be acting as a point of contact for groups who are planning future events or projects in the community. She has a very broad role which will obviously develop over time. Initially much of her work will involve contact with key groups of residents in villages and putting them in touch with the relevant people in SEBC and the wider area.

As part of this overall strategy, I have been given a locality grant of £2500 to spend in Chedburgh Ward to help get projects off the ground. Gemma and I will be working closely together in this and would welcome to hear about your ideas and aspirations.

Development Control committee. The way we deal with planning applications has been revised in an attempt to speed up the planning process. The new system will be assessed later in the year but it is generally working better than before. We now have a delegation panel to decide if an application has to come before the Committee or if it can be left with Officers to make a decision. Site inspections are now held before committee meetings so that a decision is made without the need to refer to a site visit which might not be held for another six weeks.

Car parking. Although some charges have been raised in the Borough, we are continuing to offer 'free from 3pm' on a Tuesday in our car parks and free until 10am on a Wednesday in the Lower Baxter Street car park. The independent report

commissioned by SEBC to look into pay on exit parking has come out in favour of this method of charging for parking. I hope we will adopt this recommendation in the near future as shoppers and businesses in the town are in favour of it and it will prevent the need to clock watch when shopping.

Tourist Information Office. You will be aware that the office on Angel Hill is destined to close later this year, but mobility scooters will still be available from here for the foreseeable future. Instead of just one tourist information office, we intend to have several tourist hubs throughout the town, thus opening up other areas, such as the cathedral, the theatre, Moyse's Hall and the Apex.

This will save an estimated £700,000 a year and at the same time increase the service by 400 hours.

Angela Rushen

May 2014