

Borough Councillor's September Report for Hawstead.

Anglia Revenues Partnership. ARP collects our council tax. They have now set up an enforcement agency which will ensure consistent customer service standards are maintained throughout the payment collection process. It will also ensure that enforcement fees are only incurred by debtors after all reasonable attempts have been made to engage with them to make arrangements for payment. Where debtors will not make payment and enforcement agents have to visit premises, the fees charged and recovered will be retained by the Councils, benefitting the council tax payer. It is estimated that an income from fees of £150,000 will be shared between the partners.

Apex. For the first time, income from ticket sales at The Apex has topped the £1m mark - up 42 per cent on last year.

The number of tickets sold has also leapt by 34 per cent to 63,011, of which 12,431 were new customers.

The increased income, accredited to an improved programme, marketing initiatives to reach new audiences, and excellent work from the support team, has helped bring the venue £74,732 under budget.

Parks in St Edmundsbury are amongst best in UK for cleanliness and safety. The Abbey Gardens in Bury St Edmunds, East Town Park in Haverhill, Nowton Park and West Stow Country Park, have all been awarded The Green Flag Award for 2015/16 from the national charity Keep Britain Tidy.

It is the fourth year in a row that the four parks have been awarded Green Flags.

The proposed closure of the Bury St Edmunds Magistrates' and Family Courts has been announced in a Ministry of Justice press release. SEBC will be doing all it can to prevent this happening. The travel scenarios described in the consultation document assume a starting point of Bury St Edmunds. This takes no account of difficulties faced by our rural residents in getting to Bury in the first place without a good public transport network.

If the current courts are to be closed, SEBC could offer them a new site in our next phase of the development of the Public Service Village, next to West Suffolk House. The Public Service Village is already home to adult and children's services, together with other Council services, and, in the future, we hope to share it with the Police, DWP and NHS. We shall work towards this as a viable alternative to the movement of the courts to Ipswich.

Brown Bins. The brown bin scheme has been highly successful across West Suffolk since it was introduced in the 1990s, but recycling priorities have changed and we are also facing huge financial challenges. A report went to St Edmundsbury's Cabinet yesterday setting out the background to the need, either to charge for brown bins or find up to £500,000 extra a year across St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath, which could have a potential impact on the delivery of other services. The extra cost follows significant changes to the amount Suffolk County Council, which is responsible for disposing of waste, pays councils to support collecting organic material for recycling.

A likely charge for a brown bin to collect garden waste could be around £35 a year, which is the same charge the West Suffolk councils make for a single bulky waste collection of several items. Following on from the Cabinet meeting, it is likely that a recommendation to charge for emptying brown bins will come before Full Council at the meeting on 22nd September.

West Suffolk Operational Hub. Councillors are being asked to approve a second round of consultation which would give residents across West Suffolk the opportunity to give their views about proposals for a shared waste transfer station, vehicle depot and household waste recycling site. This follows concerns raised by those who live nearest to the preferred site for the facility at Hollow Road Farm, Bury St Edmunds. The second pre-application consultation stage will ask communities to put forward their views on the concept of the Operational Hub and the preferred site at Hollow Road Farm, together with thoughts about credible, alternative sites. We are still, however, at the pre-application consultation and there is not yet a planning application for a specific site.

Parking at West Suffolk House. New parking restrictions, using free ticket machines, came into force on September 1st at West Suffolk House in Bury St Edmunds in a bid to make the car park more accessible to visitors.

All car park users will have to display a free parking ticket. The ticket is linked to the vehicle registration while the machines have been calibrated so a new ticket will not be reissued for that vehicle after the 90 minutes are up.

The restrictions will apply between 8am-5pm meaning public attending most council meetings will not have to worry how long they have left on their ticket. Special provision is also being made to ensure members of the public attending development control committee meetings will also avoid having to worry about time left on their ticket. People needing longer time will have to park in the car park in Olding Road. A fine of £70 will be imposed on those people who overstay their time.

Enforcement Action. A High Court judge has agreed with SEBC that uncontrolled use of a caravan site in Bardwell should be stopped, and imposed a 4 month prison sentence, suspended for a year, on the owner unless further undertakings are complied with. Substantial costs were awarded to SEBC.

Our **new team of enforcement officers** are now moving forward and making inroads into the backlog of cases they have inherited. The team leader is Andrew Smith who can be contacted on 01638 719734. He will be pleased to hear of any issues you may have.

Devolution. Suffolk Public Sector Leaders have all signed up in principle to expanding the devolution agenda – not just seeing local control going to the big cities and metropolitan areas but getting into the rural districts as well. Members are working together across the county and have put forward solid proposals to the Government last week. Devolution is about bringing money and responsibility down from Whitehall to the local level where we can recognise opportunities and continue to deliver more for less.

Devolution would mean quicker reaction times to deal with issues as they crop up, without having to wait for different authorities to make decisions, find the money and so on. Simpler decision-making across the whole public sector will make real differences to our communities. We are the ones who are closest, and listen, to people who live and work in West Suffolk. We know the infrastructure projects that can transform the area, opening up opportunities for more jobs, and pooling the money could help those major projects become reality much more quickly.

I attach the Devolution document that has been submitted to the government and we await further details from them as they clarify their objectives. I will keep you informed.

USAF Mildenhall. The US Department of Defence has announced recently that it will withdraw from its base at Mildenhall. We are told there will be no changes in personnel numbers until 2019, and any hand-over of sites is unlikely before 2021-22.

The Ministry of Defence has recently announced that any decision on the future of the site would be made as part of its overall review of the Defence estate, which is due to be completed in 2016. MOD will continue to work with local councils to ensure any decision takes into account local strategic planning issues and wider Government drivers.

Joint Venture Company, (Verse). As part of our aim to behave more commercially, and to counteract further Government reductions in funding, SEBC, FHDC (Forest Heath) and the publically owned commercial organisation Eastern Facilities Management Solutions (EFMS) are setting up a company, known as Verse, which will deliver facilities management at its buildings, such as catering, cleaning, courier services and security. This venture will allow the two councils to save over £40,000 per year, whilst improving services, sharing in profits, and offering the flexibility to add other services at later dates as demand requires.

Abbot's Vale. This development is in the area to the south east of Bury, south of Rougham Hill and the A14 junction 44 interchange, bordering on Nowton and Sickesmere. The Masterplan came before the Sustainable Development committee on September 3rd and will now continue its journey towards Full Council, and if passed, will be adopted at the end of the month. This is not a planning application, merely the adoption of a Masterplan; details will emerge as a planning application is lodged.

Angela Rushen

September 2015