

Report for the Annual Parish Meeting for Hawstead, May 2015

Firstly, on a personal level, I am your Borough Councillor for the next term of office. I continue to thoroughly enjoy the work which is involved. I am a member of many committees and working parties and have taken full advantage of the numerous training and briefing sessions arranged for Councillors by SEBC. It certainly is a steep learning curve to keep abreast of new legislation that keeps being announced by government, in particular planning legislation. It is important to be able to bring knowledge of changes to Parish Councils. It is also good to be able to take back to SEBC issues that are important to the residents of Hawstead.

Being a councillor can take up a lot of time; some weeks I can have a meeting every day, but other weeks can be much quieter, depending on the demands of different committees. My role as VC of Planning is the most time consuming and, I must say, the one I find the most interesting.

It has been good to have been given £2,500 this year to spend in our wards. The money is not a huge amount, but it is intended to 'seed' an idea to get it off the ground with the hope that the project will grow and develop and benefit the whole community. The £500 I have given to Hawstead has paid for the projector on the wall in here, also the circular picnic bench just outside. I hope residents will enjoy sitting and watching over the Green, perhaps watching the barn owl hunt, or their children playing. A similar amount of money will be available to be spent in Hawstead in the coming year, so get your thinking caps on!

Locality Budgets have complemented the awarding of the Rural Initiative Grants Scheme which is administered by the Grant Working Party which I currently chair. This scheme awards larger grants to villages for capital projects.

St Edmundsbury, as a whole has really moved forward this year. We have been awarded extra money from the government through our new way of working with FHDC. We are known now as West Suffolk; however, we remain separate councils, with 2 sets of councillors, and 2 separate budgets, but we share a joint leadership team and our Officers. By working together we are better able to face the considerable financial challenges that we are faced with and as a result, we have saved local taxpayers a good few million of pounds.

Extra money has also come by way of grants through our housing strategy, both in new build and bringing empty homes back into use. Council tax has been frozen yet again, however, this cannot continue in the longer term and a small rise may be necessary in the future.

As a Council, SEBC has 3 main priorities which will continue to take precedence over the next 2 years. These are;

Increased opportunities for economic growth

Encouraging resilient families and communities that are healthy and active

Homes for our communities

To give some examples of these priorities:

1. Promoting Economic Growth. By doing this we can apply for grants from the LEPs, in this instance the New Anglia LEP. This is the source of much of government money and this is helping us with our 2031 Vision. The Eastern Relief Road which will link Moreton Hall to the A14 at the Rookery Crossroads is currently coming forward hopefully to be completed by September 2016. This road will provide a new entrance to Bury and will link in with the Suffolk Business Park, a 68 hectare development providing a new upper school, 500 homes and over 14,000 jobs in the next 25 years.

2. Our Locality grants are an example of encouraging resilient families to play a greater role in determining the future of their communities. Culture and leisure are recognised as an essential part of life and it is good to see that the Apex is attracting increasing audiences and higher quality performers and the Christmas Fayre is now an important part of Bury's calendar.

West Stow country park is now being looked at to maximise its potential and to attract tourists.

3. We continue to strive to provide new homes for our area. Clearly, housing and economic growth go hand in hand. Companies will not invest large amounts of money in an area unless there are appropriate homes in the area for their employees.

Affordable Housing is also needed throughout West Suffolk. However, it has to be said that Developers have a major effect on the numbers of Affordable homes that are built as they are not as profitable for them as are open market houses.

Central government requires us as a Council to meet the demand for housing for the next 5 years. We are complying with this through our Vision 2031 document which is our masterplan for St Edmundsbury which indicates the location of development areas.

Planning services have merged with FHDC and have been generally overhauled, resulting in a quicker turn round of applications. Keeping up with frequent changes in legislation has

been challenging for both officers and members of the DC committee. We now have a robust enforcement team working alongside the planning officers. The former Fireworks Site with its various ongoing problems will, I suspect, keep us engaged for yet another year!

SEBC is now working more commercially. For example we now have own MOT facility for all our HGV fleet, whilst also servicing Suffolk and Norfolk Police and Havebury Housing vehicles. This saves money and at the same time brings in revenue from outside the council.

The West Suffolk Operational Hub, is envisaged to be developed near the Hollow Road junction by the beet factory. The results of the public consultation period are being evaluated. This project would bring together the recycling, waste transfer and depot operations of St Eds, Forest Heath and Suffolk County Council. Costs will be saved and former land released for redevelopment.

Patrick Chung is our new Mayor for this year and his deputy is Julia Wakelam

I hope that provides you with albeit a general overview of the workings of the past year in the Borough Council, together with an insight into the future.

I will always be pleased to try to help anyone in the village who might have an issue that is concerning them. My phone number is 01284 386647, or my email address is angela.rushen@stedsbc.gov.uk

I am pleased to take any questions.

Angela Rushen

May 2015.