

## **Borough Councillor's Hawstead Report for November**

**I am sharing a general update of the workings of the Council with you on a number of issues.**

**1. West Suffolk Operational Hub (WSOH)** A partnership project between Forest Heath (FHDC), St Edmundsbury (SEBC) and Suffolk County Council (SCC). West Suffolk councils approved the project to proceed to the planning stage at respective council meetings in June along with capital budgets to deliver the project.

We have been engaging with Suffolk County Council Highways team and have organised further traffic studies during the sugar beet campaign. An exact date for the submission of a planning application, which we hope will address concerns of local residents, is still to be confirmed but is likely to be in the early part of 2017.

**2. Barley Homes (Group) Ltd** (The company set up and owned by SEBC, FHDC and Suffolk County Council in order to both act commercially and to deliver much needed homes.) The initial five-year Business Plan for Barley Homes has been completed and will now go through the democratic approval process, with the final considerations by the respective councils expected in December 2016. If approval is given planning permission will be sought on the specific sites, with construction on the first site programmed for February 2018.

The initial business plan concentrates on the delivery of 96 units of private sale, private rent and affordable rented properties across four initial sites with a number of further pipeline sites across West Suffolk having already been identified for future development.

**3. Bury St Edmunds Town Centre Masterplan.** (This will shape the future town centre.). A consultant has been appointed to produce the masterplan (supported by officers, the Working Group and other stakeholders). A positive inception meeting took place on 7 November, followed by a walkabout in the town centre highlighting key issues that need to be considered.

Baseline information for the first stage of the masterplan continues to be collated, in readiness to hand over to the consultant. In addition to studies being produced (for example, Retail Study), officers are drawing up a statistical overview of Bury St Edmunds (including profiles for population, employment, housing, travel to work).

Public consultation will start in February next year.

**4. Enterprise Zones.** In the 2015 Government Autumn Statement it was confirmed that both of the Enterprise Zone (EZ) bids submitted by our two Local Enterprise Partnerships (land at Haverhill Research Park (HRP) and Suffolk Business Park (SBP)) were successful.

Since that time officers from have been working with both LEPS to agree the precise terms of the EZs.

**5. Sports and Leisure.** Bury-based sports clubs (Bury Town Football, Rugby, Sporting 87, Bury Saints, Cricket Club) met earlier this year to explore the challenges they are facing, particularly around pitch provision, home grounds and sharing facilities.

These initiatives have been developed alongside West Suffolk's new framework for Promoting Physical Activity through which we set out the commitment to enable and encourage people to lead active lives thereby increasing activity levels across West Suffolk. The framework also sets out the outcomes we want to see and how, with partners, we can use our role to increase participation in physical activity across the area.

SEBC is also undertaking practical work to encourage activity, including new play provision at, for example, the Flying Fortress Park (Moreton Hall, Bury), a five kilometre run/walk route on Moreton Hall and a grant to Bury football club to enable them to comply with FA requirements.

**Parks & Heritage.** St Edmundsbury has recently been awarded £108,000 from the Arts Council to implement a programme of improvements at West Stow and Moyse's Hall Museum designed to make the two facilities more financially resilient.

West Stow has also been shortlisted in the National Best School Trip Award 2016. The site is in a shortlist of five and the awards ceremony will reveal the winning venue at an awards ceremony in London later this month (November).

St Edmundsbury has been awarded a grant of £40,000 to develop a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the former Abbey precinct in Bury St Edmunds (which covers the Abbey Gardens, Great Churchyard, Cathedral and neighbouring meadows). Whilst the grant itself has been awarded to the Borough Council, we have formed a partnership group with the Cathedral to oversee the work, the outcome of which will help inform future bids for funding improvements.

**6. Home-Link.** Home-Link has introduced new technology and moved from a fortnightly to a weekly bidding cycle. A backlog of work, mainly around processing new applications, arose due to the complications of switching systems. All teething troubles directly affecting customers have been resolved, although we do still have a backlog of cases where applicants have asked for a review of their band which is being worked through. Each application has been allocated a dedicated case worker who the applicant is able to liaise with and promptly resolve any queries over their case. All were a number of issues relating to the back office, such as some notes and documents that needed to be transferred from the previous system, this work was completed at the end of October.

**7. Shared Legal Services.** Babergh District, Forest Heath District, Mid Suffolk District and St Edmundsbury Borough councils have brought together their legal teams to form a shared service that can work collaboratively, sharing both their own individual expertise and the experience gained from working with external advisers. The increased resilience and capacity will support the new ways that councils need to work in the future and provide an increased breadth of expertise whilst transforming the way the team works. It will also provide a more attractive offer to recruit and retain local government lawyers in a competitive labour market. The new service is based at the West Suffolk councils' offices in Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall.

**8. Newbury Community Centre.** Progress with the Newbury Community Centre project is going well, with community consultation on a proposal to create a mixed scheme of housing, community facilities and open space on the combined sites of the community centre, children's centre and former Howard Primary School. The project is a consortium of St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Suffolk County Council, Havebury and, leading the Board, Newbury Community Association. HEART (representing the wider Howard Estate) are also engaged.

**9. Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution Agreement.** Formal consultation closed on 23 August and a summary of the responses was sent to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to help inform his decision-making process. Any agreement depends on the authority having an elected mayor.

Key elements of the Norfolk/Suffolk deal are:

- £25m funding each year for the next 30 years (£750m) to support economic growth, development of local infrastructure and jobs (this would increase the local economy to £43bn and create 95,000 jobs by 2026)
- £130m investment over five years to support the building of new homes across Norfolk and Suffolk
- Over the lifetime of the deal around 200,000 homes could be delivered
- Control of a £225m transport budget for the next four years
- Control of an existing c£20m annual adult skills fund to ensure the training offer matches the needs of local businesses and the local labour market
- Control of an existing c£2m annual Apprenticeship Grant for employers

If all councils and the LEP approve the draft order a Combined Authority would be established from 1 March 2017 with Mayoral elections taking place on 4 May 2017.

An Extraordinary Council meetings to consider giving consent to an Order establishing a Mayoral Combined Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk will be held on November 21<sup>st</sup> at 6.30pm.

If all Councils continue to agree with the offer, it will go ahead. Any Councils in Norfolk or Suffolk who do not agree at present will be able to opt in at a later date. If any of the current signees opt out, the offer will be withdrawn and the monies allocated elsewhere in the country.

#### **10. DCLG consultations on Business Rate Retention and LG Finance changes.**

A Suffolk-wide consultation which closed on 26 September gave us the opportunity to identify some of the issues to be kept in mind in designing the reforms needed to allow local government to retain 100% of the business rates raised locally. Our comments focused on the need for the new system to ensure that local authorities are properly rewarded for

securing growth in their areas, while at the same time recognising the need for some redistribution based on the differing needs of local areas.

**11. West Suffolk campaign on premises licensing for business rate defaulters.** Despite the unsuccessful amendment to the Policing and Crime Bill, the West Suffolk councils and the LGA are continuing to lobby Government for powers to allow councils to refuse new premises licensing applications and suspend existing premises licences in cases where the licensee has failed to pay their business rates. Under the current system councils are only allowed to take into account the four licensing objectives and are forced to grant licences even in cases where the licensee owes thousands of pounds in business rates, with the problem worsened by 'phoenix companies' being set up once their original company has gone bankrupt without any obligation to pay old debts.

**12. Westly Bridge, Newmarket Road.** The design and construction of the scaffold has finally been approved by Network Rail and will start to be erected on 31<sup>st</sup> of October. This will take about 3 weeks to do because of having to work in with railway timetables. Once completed, strengthening works to the edges of the deck can begin and will hopefully be completed by Christmas. Scaffolding will then be removed and strengthening of the deck slab can begin. Single line traffic will continue during this time. However, complete road closure from about mid February will be essential for about 6 weeks. The date for final completion of all the work will be around Easter weekend, or mid April.

**13. Recycling problems.** A campaign is being launched by the Suffolk Waste Partnership to highlight the importance of people getting their recycling right. Every household in Suffolk will get a letter to remind people what can and can't go in recycling bins as contamination levels have been rising due to unsuitable items being put in their bins.

All recyclable waste collected from Suffolk households is taken to the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) in Great Blakenham, where it is sorted and baled before being sent on for recycling. This facility is designed to only accept and process certain materials. If the wrong items are delivered they have to be removed, sometimes by hand. Banned items include textiles and clothes, food waste, glass, electrical items, and batteries. Aluminium foil needs to be rolled into a tennis ball size before being placed in the recycling bin. Nappies must go in the black bin. Items less than 4 centimetres across are too small to recycle as they clog up the machines. Bottle tops should be put back on the bottle.

**14. Honorary Freedom of the Borough.** At Full Council on 27th of September it was unanimously decided that the Honorary Freedom of the Borough should be conferred on HMS Vengeance and TS St Edmund (Mayor's Own) Sea Cadet Corps. The ceremony will probably be held on May 18th next year alongside the Mayor making and annual meeting of the Council. The award is in recognition of t Christmas gift ideas, food, drink as well as games and fairground rides.

**15. Christmas Fayre.** This year's fayre takes place from Thursday 24 November through to 27 November. The fayre opens for local residents from 2pm on the 24th. The opening night will include discounts on fairground rides, an opening parade of children's puppets from the

arc to the Abbey Gardens at 5.30pm, plus fireworks in the Abbey Gardens from 7.45pm – and there is free parking after 4pm.

The fayre then resumes on Friday from 9am. This year it will be more spread out around the town centre. Traders in St Johns Street will have a host of street entertainment and special offers, with the street closed to traffic 9am to 6pm Friday to Sunday.

A park and ride service will run Friday to Sunday from Manns of Saxham, whilst additional parking will also be available on the Saturday only at Bury Rugby Club, and on the Saturday and Sunday at Greene King, the Priory School and West Suffolk College.

**16. Post Office.** The relocating to WHS is a bit behind schedule because the site in WHS is not quite ready.

**17. Magistrate Courts.** You will be aware by now that the Courts in Bury have closed, meaning any visit to court will involve travelling to Ipswich.

**Angela Rushen**

**November 2016**