

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL: PALGRAVE WARD MEMBER'S REPORT FOR 2017/18

Presented at Palgrave's Annual Parish Meeting on 11 May 2018

I'm very aware that the workings of local government can be very uninteresting to the residents who receive its services. Deciding what to include in this annual report is therefore quite difficult. I'm not going to attempt a summary of all that has taken place at the council in this very busy year but here are a few snippets that I am presenting simply as...

HAPPENINGS AND OTHER ITEMS OF POSSIBLE INTEREST:

- Mid Suffolk District Council completed its **move from the Needham Market HQ to Endeavour House** in Ipswich, as did Babergh DC from theirs in Hadleigh. Endeavour House is also the home of Suffolk County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Groups.
 - Nearly all MSDC's furniture was surplus to requirements in the new home and much of it was donated to local charities and community groups
 - Pretty much everything else was moved to Ipswich, from the entire IT system down to staplers and stationery.
 - To save space, some 1.2 million documents were scanned.
 - I would guess that about 60% of staff now work from Endeavour House; the rest are usually out on site-related work or work from home. Everyone is assessed on performance, which is not dependent on when and where they do the work.
 - We have established a new Customer Access Point in Stowmarket for those few occasions when face-to-face contact is needed.
 - A new website has been launched, which contains more information than the old one and is easier to navigate. For efficiency – and thereby to save money – we are encouraging all our residents to use the website as the primary means of contact with the council.
 - When a phone conversation is necessary there is now a single number to call.
- The Boundary Commission for England is **reviewing the ward boundaries in the district** to achieve two objectives:
 - Reduce the number of councillors from 40 to 34.
 - Equalise the number of electors in each ward as far as possible.
 - Locally this is likely to add three new parishes, namely Braiseworth, Stoke Ash and Thwaite, to the existing five parishes in Palgrave Ward.
 - The new boundaries will come into effect from May next year.
- Recent publicity on **'One Council?'**: Remember the referendum in 2011 when Mid Suffolk residents voted to merge with our neighbour to the south, Babergh DC, but theirs voted against? When the votes were put together theirs narrowly won the day.
 - The merger therefore didn't go ahead but integration of the two work forces did and we have been functioning more efficiently and at less cost as a result.
 - Over the years Babergh and Mid Suffolk have operated with increasing alignment.
 - We have drifted closer together to a point where it seemed logical to consider dissolving the two councils and re-forming as one.
 - This is what Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury to the west of us and Waveney and Suffolk Coastal to the east of us have already done (or are in the process of so doing).
 - But recently the Leader of Suffolk County Council has reopened the exploration of the Unitary Council idea for the area, combining the functions currently managed separately: the county council is responsible, for example, for education, social care provision and waste disposal in Mid Suffolk, whereas the district council handles, amongst others, licensing, waste collection and environmental health.

- Under the unitary system all the services required in a given area would be provided by a single authority
 - The area covered by a unitary authority need not be the whole county.
 - Until this unitary suggestion has been fully explored, Babergh and Mid Suffolk have put on hold the idea of becoming one council.
- Throughout the year our strategic planning team has been working on a new **Joint Local Plan**:
 - The Local Plan is the document containing the policies against which all planning applications are assessed and decided. This new Plan will be applicable in both Mid Suffolk and Babergh districts.
 - It will replace our 1998 Local Plan and our 2008 Core Strategy (reviewed in 2012).
 - Already there has been one public consultation and there will be another in the autumn before the Plan is submitted for examination.
 - The new complement of development site allocations that will form part of the Plan will enable the recovery of our much talked about 5-year land supply.
- Elsewhere on the Planning front:
 - Introduced **fee structure for pre-application advice**, which has so far yielded £88,000 income.
 - Introduced the **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**, which is paid on residential developments by the developer, except on strategic sites. It is an obligatory payment, which is used to mitigate the impact of the development on infrastructure such as schooling and local roads.
 - **Neighbourhood Plans** were introduced in 2011 as part of the Localism Act. They sit on top of the Local Plan and allow a parish/town council to devise a set of policies on development that add detail those in the Local Plan and have the same statutory weight.
 - So far only Mendlesham has taken its NP through to adoption but there are 16 others in various stages of preparation. Stradbroke's will be the next to be adopted and Laxfield and Fressingfield are the latest ones to embark on the journey.
 - Most notable, of course, is the Diss and District Neighbourhood Plan, a venture started last August involving seven parishes, three of which – Palgrave being one – are on the Suffolk side of the boundary. We believe this is the first NP to be cross-county.

SIGNIFICANT LOCAL PLANNING APPLICATIONS:

- **Cranswick Chicken** – £50 million investment in a state-of-the-art processing factory on Eye Airfield, representing a relocation of their existing factory at Weybread. 750 jobs. Permission granted
- **Andrew West** – eight 91x23 -metre broiler rearing sheds with a capacity of 350,000 birds at Brome on land south of Church Farm, accessed via Nicks Lane. Permission granted recently.
- **BP** – Filling Station and associated convenience store with McDonald's drive-thru and restaurant in the parish of Stuston at what is known as the Scole roundabout. Not yet determined but is provisionally scheduled to be decided by the planning committee on 6 June 2018.
- **Progress Power/Drax** – gas-fired power station at Eye Airfield and associated substation in Yaxley; this was substantially approved in August 2015. A lot of preliminary work has been carried out this year, including archaeological investigations at both the airfield and Yaxley sites. Also hedgerow reduction and scrub clearance where the temporary junction with the A140 for substation construction traffic will be. Construction work proper will begin when the company succeeds in getting a contract to supply electricity at the annual capacity market auction, held in December. They have failed to gain a contract at the last three auctions but if successful next December, construction work is likely to begin early in the new year.
- **Mr & Mrs Paul Yaxley** – change of use to wedding venue at Marsh Farm, Thrandeston. Permission was granted on 25 April 2018.