

## Annual Report to Gipping Valley

April 2018

### My Activities

I have attended virtually all parish council meetings missing just a few when several parishes meet the same night. This keeps me in touch with local views and allows me to respond to questions face to face. Many questions I get via email although my response can be slow when officer response is required. Highways and flooding have been significant themes.

At the County I am vice chair of the Scrutiny Committee and take a major and active part in establishing if the right services are being delivered effectively, efficiently and in sufficient volume. I chair the liaison meeting at the Energy from Waste plant where the Suez management always appears responsive to local views. This large French company appears to understand the need to be open and honest.

At the District Council my major involvement is with planning and scrutiny. Meetings to deal with the current rush of applications involve a couple of days preparation and often a 9:30 am to 7:00pm meeting. That raises a question, is it possible to give matters the attention they deserve at the end of such a meeting?

### Suffolk County Council

2017-18 has been a further year of cuts in the government grant to councils. Increases in the demand from an ageing population and the need to cope with the increasingly complex needs of people whom modern medical science manages to keep alive present a challenge. In addition, we have increasing expectations for the quality of life that the elderly and the disabled should enjoy.

The Council is trying to square this circle by increasing efficiency, reducing waste, providing only the services they have a duty to supply and “managing demand”. The latter is always concerning as it can be just denial of service and may be related to the stories I get from residents about those with significant care needs who cannot get the service they require.

Government grants to the county have reduced by some £22M and costs in Social Care and Care for young people have risen. Increases in business rates, a 3% rise in Council Tax, a 2% increase in the “Social Care Precept”, and an increase in the Government’s Better Care Fund help fill the gap. However, there is still £23.9m savings to be found, particularly from social care.

There are several “Transformation Projects” underway across the county’s departments to change the way problems are approached. On line access to allow self-service is a major theme and an up to date case management system for social care is another. The administration hopes these will reduce costs while maintaining service in the face of an increasing population.

A further major focus involves encouraging people to do things for themselves, part of “demand management.” It is a good thing when the activities are totally within their ability, leaving them more confident and with a better life. Unfortunately, if the task is beyond capabilities attempts to avoid providing service can have a severe knock-on effect in the health service.

### Education

Educational achievement in the county is still close to the bottom of the league table, although there are minor improvements. Our children deserve better, but it is difficult to identify the core problem. Focus on school re-organisation and cuts to the school improvement service can’t have helped. The county believes the problem lies with school leadership.

The administration's first attempt to rectify the position, the first phase of the "Raising the Bar" strategy has been completed and a second phase, the "Raising the Bar 2018-20 strategy" has been defined. This will focus on three priorities:

- Exceptional leadership and governance across the education sector
- Excellence in teaching and learning, driven by system led improvement and innovation
- The best opportunities for every child and young person

The strategy includes a very ambitious goal to place the education system in Suffolk among the top 25% nationally. These goals will not be achievable without adequate investment, so I am concerned that there is no new funding. We have no option but to hope academisation will deliver the goods.

## **School transport policy**

The administration's vision is to establish a set of the minimum, legally required, school and post-16 travel policies which are complemented by "Local Solutions" from parents, carers, schools, colleges, communities, and parish councils. The county currently intends to provide free transport only to the closest suitable school if it is over 2 miles for children under eight and under 3 miles for those under 16. Older pupils will only get transport in exceptional circumstances.

Local Solutions include: moving students from taxis to larger vehicles; increasing acceptable journey times; hub collection points in villages; drop off points further away from schools; 20% increased loading of transport and additional level of capacity on buses for parents to purchase. The Local Solutions would be brokered through the new Suffolk Travel Choices Service.

One good idea is for parents to 'opt-in to' the travel service. Currently travel places are organised for all eligible children whether their parents want them or not. That is what causes the empty spaces we see on school transport. The places released would be available for others to purchase.

## **Highways**

We have had a surfeit of works in Gipping Valley where diversions are long, and progress appears glacial. The recent work in Claydon and at Hackneys Corner did not appear to be staffed continuously although there was no apparent shortage of expensive equipment on site. The County has written to the Government calling for new guidance strengthening the powers of planning and highway authorities to place tougher disruption minimising conditions on developers and utilities.

The poor performance of the highways contract with Kier is still a major problem. Pothole numbers increase despite changes to the Suffolk Highways management structure. Attempts to move to a planned rather than reactive approach to eliminate "temporary" repairs do not appear effective.

The Lib Dem, Green and independent Group believe it would be better if the Highways contract were returned in-house. On a positive note the County Council plans to borrow an extra £21m over the next three years, to pay for resurfacing of 25%, 1,000 miles of Suffolk's roads.

## **Mid Suffolk District Council**

Gipping Valley is under siege from developers who want to get plans approved while the district lacks a "five-year land supply" and sustainability is the only constraint they face.

Claydon, Barham, Great Blakenham and Bramford are defined as Core Villages in the Ipswich Fringe area. As such we get a lot of development since we are near the centre of employment growth. Not what many of you want to hear but we desperately need housing and if it is close to jobs, that's logical. We will get

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between 20% and 35% of the total Mid Suffolk growth, about 580 new houses per village between 2014 and 2036. That would include the current rush of applications which currently total just under 2000 houses. Great Blakenham is there already!

The Council has moved to Endeavour House, a move that is claimed to save money compared to keeping open both Hadleigh and Needham Market offices. Had one closed the situation would have been different. However, the move may pave the way to a unitary council for Suffolk.