

DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE 2018 PARISH ANNUAL MEETINGS IN THE CLAYDON & BARHAM WARD

We are pleased to have this opportunity to look back on the Council year 2017/18 and set out briefly some of the highlights both district-wide and more locally.

Relocation to Endeavour House

It was clear to anyone walking through the two council offices in Needham Market and Hadleigh that both had become significantly under-utilised since staffing numbers had reduced as a result of the savings arising from establishing a single workforce to support both councils. Amalgamation into just one office seemed a logical conclusion. With space becoming available in the County Council's Endeavour House, a business case and financial assessment indicated significant savings could be achieved by consolidating many of the two district councils' activities within that space. Running cost savings and the avoidance of considerable capital expenditure on office upgrades drove the financial case but the need for a fundamental mindset change in the way of working in an increasingly digital age was also a key driver behind the move. Staff quickly settled into the new office and their close association, with County and health staff in this public-sector campus, has improved dialogue and communication for the benefit of all. A new 'one-stop shop' customer service centre opened in Stowmarket for those still needing face-to-face contact. The Council is now well advanced in developing their regeneration plans for the former Needham Market site.

Merger of the two Councils

Although we now have one combined workforce, we still operate as two sovereign councils. This creates some inefficiencies and double working for staff supporting two sets of councillors. In the west and east of Suffolk, the four district councils there are in the process of merging into two 'super-districts' effective March 2019 and logic suggested likewise for Babergh and Mid Suffolk. Referendums held in 2011 indicated public support for this in Mid Suffolk but not in Babergh. Both councils undertook opinion polling of residents in 2017/18, the results of which indicated statistically significant public support for a full merger. These plans however were 'thrown a curve ball' when the County indicated a new desire to look at a unitary structure for public service provision in Suffolk. Although the County took a unilateral approach to commissioning a study on this, our two district councils have put their merger plans on-hold whilst discussions and investigations into unitary provision are examined further.

Finances and Investments

Although the developing business case for a merger highlighted potential financial and efficiency savings, Mid Suffolk's four-year Medium Term Financial Strategy indicated that our finances remain robust with very healthy levels of reserves. The reserves have built up from both consistently bringing in actual annual financial outturns significantly better than the budgets and also by initially putting aside New Homes Bonus annual grants and only utilising a small part of these for transformational projects rather than for day-to-day finances needs. We have also made

investments in collective funds, property and solar PV panels to generate a number of income streams to replace reduced central government funding. The result has been that we have only needed to make modest, below inflation increases in the Mid Suffolk share of the council tax precept whilst bringing in a balanced and sustainable budget.

Localities Grants

At a ward level, your two district councillors made a number of locality grant distributions during the year. We have helped finance improvements to the Claydon Football Club ground, Claydon & Barham Village Hall and Henley Community Centre and provided some funding to the new Youth Zone and St Peter's Over 60s Club as well as providing a new Mess Tent for the Claydon Scouts. We are always open to requests for grant funding from local community groups.

Local Planning Matters

We took the decision early in 2017/18 to adopt a proactive approach to the two large and contentious planning applications affecting Claydon & Whitton and Barham. It was clear from both the public meeting and our regular attendance at parish council meetings that there was overwhelming public hostility to these large developments. We ensured that the many public responses to parish questionnaires were all lodged on the planning website and we worked closely with local objectors prior to the applications coming before the planning committees. Our passionate defence of the 'green zone' which separates Claydon and Barham from Ipswich and a strong emphasis on traffic concerns, together with the eloquence of parish and individual objectors, led to the committee refusing the large Claydon application. We also highlighted traffic concerns and overwhelming public hostility to the committee deciding on the Barham proposal and at the time of writing this report, the Barham application for 300 houses has a 'minded to refuse' status. We understand the need for sustainable housing development within Mid Suffolk but are in complete agreement with the public sentiment regarding these plans to add over 600 new houses locally outside the Claydon and Barham settlement boundary.

YOUR DISTRICT COUNCILLORS in the Claydon & Barham Ward are:-

John Whitehead : 01473 833279 or john.whitehead@midsuffolk.gov.uk

John was first elected to Mid Suffolk District Council in 2011 and then re-elected in 2015. In his first two years John served on the Scrutiny Committee and Development Control Committee. John then joined the Executive Committee in the role of Portfolio Holder for Planning. In council year 2016/17 John remained on the Executive Committee but in a change of role, became the Portfolio Holder for Finance. With the Council moving over to a Cabinet model from the start of 2017/18 John was given the role of Cabinet Member for Finance as well as being appointed Deputy Leader of the Council.

James Caston : 07789957444 or james.caston@midsuffolk.gov.uk

James was first elected to Mid Suffolk District Council in 2015. James is on the Scrutiny Committee, Regulatory Committee and Licensing Act 2003 Committee. Scrutiny Committee provides an excellent introduction for councillors to get an understanding of the detailed workings of the Council and its interactions with many outside bodies.