

BABERGH – Highlights and Achievements for 2015/16

Financial/Organisational

- **Devolution** - Following weeks of negotiation between Government and local councils and LEPs a deal worth over £1bn for East Anglia was announced in the budget on the 16th March by George Osborne MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer. As part of the deal East Anglia would receive:
 - £900m (£30m a year for the next 30 years) to invest in infrastructure
 - £175m to invest in housing
- The Deal, which sets out a fundamentally different relationship between Government and local public services, was negotiated by Leaders from councils across Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the New Anglia and Greater Cambridgeshire and Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnerships. However it is important to note, it's not a 'done deal' it requires ratification by each of the local councils and the LEP boards. The Deal requires the creation of a Combined Authority and directly elected Mayor and it is proposed that the first mayoral elections would be in May 2017 alongside county council elections.
- **2016/17 Council budgets see small Council Tax rises.**
- **Elections.**
- **The Council's Joint Strategic Plan** is being refreshed following the election in May last year as the two new administrations wanted to review and update the strategies of the two Councils, in light of key local, regional and national factors that have changed since the Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) was developed in 2013/14. It will set out how the Councils aim to provide services to deliver positive, sustainable change in our individual and business communities over the next five years. A focused management review has been undertaken to ensure that we make the best use of our resources and direct them to the activities and interventions needed to secure delivery of our new Strategic Plan.
- **Capital Investment Strategy** – In July, both Council's approved a plan to invest the Councils' cash and capital resources to generate revenue income, achieve an increase in capital value in the longer term and stimulate local economic growth.

Housing

- **New Homes** - We have planning consent to build 27 new council homes supported by Homes and Communities Agency grant funding. These are the first houses to be built in a generation and will be completed by the end of 2016/17.
- **A revised tenancy agreement** was approved for Babergh's Council tenants.
- **Decent Homes Standard** - A targeted campaign has been launched to encourage landlords and homeowners to take up grants and loans to bring their homes up to the Decent Home Standard, that were made available under the Housing Renewal Policy approved by both councils in February 2015.
- **Empty Homes** - The private sector housing team's work to return empty homes to occupation has now expanded to include empty commercial buildings.
- **New Housing Allocations Policy** adopted.
- **Trusted Partner Pilot** - Babergh and Mid Suffolk have been chosen by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to participate in a Trusted Partner pilot scheme to identify tenants who may struggle to pay their rent, following the introduction of Universal Credit. The pilot will allow us to make appropriate recommendations for a payment of housing costs direct to the landlord, (known as an Alternative

Payment Arrangement (APA)). The pilot will last between six and nine months and started in January 2016.

- **Help to Buy** - Council tenants who want to buy their own homes are being urged to apply for £20k grants to help them onto the property ladder. Both councils were successful in apply for funding from the Government's £84m Right-To-Buy social Mobility Fund which was launched last year.
- **Right to Buy** - We have re-invested Right to Buy (RTB) receipts in 4 properties with a further 6 in the pipeline. A total of £1,580,495 of RTB receipts committed.
- **Houses in Multiple Occupation** - The Private Sector Housing Team has begun a programme of identifying and inspecting Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) across the two councils. A HMO is a property that is shared by three or more tenants who are not members of the same family.
- **Sheltered Housing Review** - It has been some five years since this service was last reviewed. People are living longer and we need to make sure that the service we offer meets the needs of residents now and in the future, whilst also providing value for money. As part of the review, we consulted residents to get their views on the service, what they like, what they don't like, what we could do better etc. We conducted 25 separate tenant involvement events with our Sheltered Residents at 22 different locations across the two districts.

Growth/Business

- **CIL** - In January both councils voted to adopt CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) charging in the districts. Charging will start on 11th April meaning that any planning permission granted on or after this date may be liable to pay CIL. The Infrastructure Team will be providing further information over the coming months and at Parish Liaison meetings with further details on what CIL charging means for communities and how you can take advantage of the opportunities it presents.
- **Neighbourhood Plan** - 15 parishes across Babergh and Mid Suffolk have expressed interest in developing neighbourhood plans.
- **Tourism Strategy** - Suffolk Economic Portfolio Holders have agreed the Suffolk Tourism Strategy. The Strategy aims to support a county wide brand (Visit Suffolk) and support creating Destination Management Organisations.
- **Business Awards** - 3 Mid Suffolk and 1 Babergh business received awards at the EADT Business Awards on Thursday evening 9 July.
- **Food Enterprise Zones** - Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have each been awarded a grant to set up two new Food Enterprise Zones – one in Wherstead called the **Orwell Food Enterprise Zone** and the other at the Mill Lane Business Park in Stowmarket called the **Gipping Food Enterprise Zone**.
- **Enterprise Zones** - Last November the chancellor announced that Babergh and Mid Suffolk, together with the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership secured two of the Government's prestigious Enterprise Zones. One in Sproughton, and another one in Stowmarket.
- **Joint Local Plan** - We are seeking to develop a Joint Local Plan for Babergh and Mid Suffolk (both Councils currently have separate policies) and have briefed Councillors on our intended approach. We have started a detailed conversation with Councillors (the cluster meetings) on how the district wide housing targets may resonate at a local level. This includes a conversation about the impact of growth on infrastructure,

facilities and the service improvement opportunities that arise. There will be an ongoing dialogue with Councillors as the plan progresses.

- **Planning** - The Development Management team has changed and now forms three officer teams to serve specific areas within both Babergh and Mid Suffolk. The teams will over time establish improved local connections with the areas they cover with the support of their dedicated officers. A new fourth start up team has also been formed to ensure much faster registering and validation of applications and enquiries. This is the first step of a number of planned improvements for Development Management in the next year to ensure clear routes of communication for consultees, members, parish councils, residents and developers.

Communities

- **Community Caretaker Scheme** Pilot Rolled Out.
- **Joint Community Achievement Awards.** We will be delivering a single event for both Mid Suffolk and Babergh Councils this year. This is due to be held on 21st April 2016 at Wherstead Park and will celebrate the achievements of 29 unsung heroes who have worked tirelessly to make a difference within our communities.
- **Capital Grants** are provided to the community to support village halls, community centres, sports clubs, community shops and events. In 2015/16 £104,355 was allocated across Babergh. Against a total project cost of £420,649, our support of 25% grant allocation levered in a further 75% funding for our communities.
- **Health and Housing Pilot** - A key aspect of our contribution to improving health and wellbeing within our district is our collaborative approach with partners. With funding from Public Health, we are in the process of designing an innovative and unique new health and wellbeing offer to a sample of tenants in Hadleigh and Needham Market. The pilot project will provide different levels of support and a range of community-based health and wellbeing interventions that we expect will address the council's rent and council tax arrears, improve self-reported wellbeing and in addition, to contribute to reduced demand on local health and care services.

Environment & Environmental Health

- **Improved Joint Working** across the whole waste system in Suffolk with a joint project being developed across all Suffolk local authorities through the Suffolk Waste Partnership (SWP).
- **New waste contracts** - Babergh and Mid Suffolk councils undertook two successful tendering processes with the Suffolk Waste Partnership. One for the servicing of all of the recycling bring sites across the County, which was awarded to Indigo Waste Services Ltd (IWS), and one for all garden waste, awarded to Material Change based in Creting St Mary.
- **The Open for Business project** (OfB) will improve the experience of businesses working with the Councils' regulatory services by changing organisational culture; putting business customers' experiences at the heart of our ways of working and; ensuring businesses understand what their responsibilities are. A business account manager pilot has established a single point of contact to a business enquiry.
- **Open for Business - Better Business Event.** A successful business engagement event was held. The business facing services of the councils along with representatives of the New Anglia Growth Hub and chambers of commerce were available for businesses based in the Mid Suffolk area to talk to. This was intended to be the first of these events with a view to perhaps making future ones more sector-specific.

- **Photovoltaic Panels (PV)** have been installed across a number of properties.
- **Energy Efficiency** - £6m helping businesses in Norfolk and Suffolk to become more energy efficient.
- **Healthier Catering Award** - The Suffolk Healthier Catering Award 'Eat Out Eat Well (EOEW)' was launched. Catering businesses can apply for three levels of award, gold, silver and bronze. The gold award will generally require a member of the catering business staff to have a formal qualification in nutrition; training that the Food and Safety team at BMSDC are now offering. The motivation behind initiating this award in Suffolk is twofold. With obesity a significant problem, there was a mandate from the Health and Wellbeing Board with the public health driver clear. The award also gives catering food businesses an opportunity to differentiate themselves and potentially create a recognised additional ethical selling point whether to employees in the case of staff canteens or to the public if a café or restaurant.