



Forest Heath
District Council

Annual Report 2012/13

May 2013

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Foreword from the Leader

In a time of economic troubles and cuts in funding, this council has achieved some tremendous things over the past year, and this annual report gives us just a flavour. We have been actively involved with our local communities and businesses, right at the grass roots and strategic levels, making real differences to people's lives.

This Forest Heath Annual Report 2012/13 shows how we have delivered on the actions we set out last year in our 2012-2016 Strategic Plan

Some of our achievements reflect the variety of work we are involved in;

- We've made great progress on the Home of Horseracing which is going to be an amazing place to visit when it opens in late 2015. The £15m project is going to be a great draw for people of all ages, especially families, and its location means it's going to help transform the centre of Newmarket. This is regeneration at its best, with the public sector, charities, private organisations and individuals all working together to raise funds and develop a first class attraction which will benefit not just Newmarket but the surrounding area too.
- Broadband is a key factor in the success of business within the district and we have been supporting Suffolk County Council and the BDUK project to start the delivery of superfast broadband across the villages in Forest Heath.
- Working in the community we have helped 296 households in the district to adapt their homes to meet the needs of vulnerable residents.
- Putting Forest Heath on the map is a key element of our drive to increase tourism. We successfully put forward a great case for the Olympic Torch Relay to visit Newmarket and our 64 Community Champions helped marshal the route for the 15,000 visitors who came this historic event.
- For the first time councillors can also support projects and activities within their own wards with some direct funding by using our locality budgets of £2500. Sometimes just a few pounds can transform the work of a small local project.

We are facing huge financial challenges and are preparing for more change in the future. But we are proud to say that Forest Heath District Council has continued to deliver our high level services to residents and businesses without increasing Council Tax.

Doing more with less, working closely with partners and finding ways to do things differently are key and our shared service approach with St Edmundsbury Borough Council is leading the way. I doubt there are councils anywhere else in the country that have managed to appoint a shared Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Service, agree a shared payline and get so far along the whole restructure process in just a year. We did all of this whilst continuing to deliver great services.

I hope you enjoy reading this year's annual report and look forward to reporting further progress next year.



Cllr James Waters, Leader of Forest Heath District Council

Review of 2012/13 strategic priorities

The Strategic Plan for 2012-2016 sets out how we will deliver our Strategic Priorities which are:

- 1 **Economic growth:** a stronger local economy which is capable of growing
- 2 **Housing:** meeting the district's housing needs
- 3 **Community development:** stronger, more active communities; and
- 4 **Efficient and effective council:** maintaining quality services

In order to help us deliver these priorities we identified aims and a number of objectives. Many of the aims and objectives are ambitious and will take time to complete, however, this report presents progress and how we are working towards achieving them.

Priority 1. Economic growth

Aim: A stronger local economy which is capable of growing

- Objective 1: Create the right conditions for economic growth
- Objective 2: Provide support to existing firms, work to retain key businesses and jobs and support new business start-ups
- Objective 3: Attract inward investment and revitalising our high streets as a vibrant part of our towns

Why was this a priority for 2012/13?

We are committed to supporting the local economy and helping to enable its growth for the future. We understand that vibrant and sustainable communities need a strong local economy, accessible to all and supported by effective education and training. We have begun a series of actions to help make this happen and some of the progress is described below.

Objective 1: Create the right conditions for economic growth

We are working with the two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) (New Anglia and Greater Cambridge/Greater Peterborough) to raise the profile of the district for inward investment. The LEPs are currently working on developing a brand and image for Cambridge, and we are working to attract inward investment for Forest Heath as part of this. We also have information available for local businesses offering advice on the benefits of moving to Forest Heath.

We work to ensure that our plans and policies support growth in the district. Our Core Strategy makes provision for development that will aim to deliver a minimum of 7300 additional jobs in the district by 2026. A minimum of 16 hectares of additional employment land will be allocated up until 2026 to help support this growth. Employment sites will be identified and allocated through the Site Allocations Local Plan document which will be the subject of consultation in 2013.

We have reviewed the marketing of Forest Heath as a place to do business, and are part of the current UK Trade and Investment programme which operates at a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) level. We have recently invested in a commercial website www.locations4business.com

as an additional source for enquiries. This website provides an overview of information including the cost of living, cost of employment and access to services in the district, for companies looking to relocate or establish new premises.

We are working in close partnership with Suffolk County Council and district councils to deliver the Better Broadband for Suffolk project (BB4S). This £40 million scheme will offer superfast broadband to 85-90% of premises across the whole of the county by 2015.

Objective 2: Provide support to existing firms, work to retain key businesses and jobs and support new business start-ups

We have been using our Small Business Grant Scheme to support local businesses. A total of 18 start-up businesses have been supported through the scheme since its inception in 2011/12 ranging from beauty therapy to metal fabricators. One business used the money to buy an integral piece of equipment which has led to business growth and created a couple of jobs. Another is where a person has been made redundant and they have taken this as an opportunity to become self-employed.

With funding from the West Suffolk Partnership, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils

have supported 31 local businesses through the Greener Business Grant to the value of £21,300. This investment is predicted to deliver annual energy savings of £19,500 for the businesses and an annual CO₂ reduction of 91 tonnes.

We are looking to develop an enterprise hub/innovation centre in the district. During the year we identified a potential site in Newmarket, but this has proved unviable. We will continue to actively investigate a potential site. A study of innovation centres is being carried out in 2013/14.

We have undertaken a review of the council-owned industrial units. This review and advice forms part of the asset management plan which considers all options for the future management of these business properties, to best support economic growth.

We are also in the process of reviewing and aligning our tendering process to make it simpler for businesses to work with the council. The streamlined process is being implemented in 2013/14 with a web-based system. This will help small businesses and be a more accessible and transparent process that will make tendering easier.

As a council we recognise the importance of our role in helping to ensure that young people have the necessary skills for their future place in the workforce. A skilled and qualified workforce will help to promote economic development in the district. This year a number of projects have been developed including:

- working with partners to help ensure that a local business perspective is included in any careers advice;
- maximising non-school educational based learning including community education for adults, local democracy for young people, informal education opportunities; and
- ensuring the effectiveness of careers advice is measured in outcomes.

Forest Heath is an active member of the newly formed West Suffolk Partnership (WSP) (formerly West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership). The WSP provides for a wide range of organisations to work together and provide

an environment in which partners, communities and individuals can make the most effective use of their joint resources to make a difference on local issues. The West Suffolk Operational Group (WSOG) is the support group for the WSP and amongst other things it gathers information in order to gain an understanding of the specific problems facing West Suffolk. Through this the WSP has formed a pilot project around those not in education, employment or training (NEET). The aim of the project is to identify people in danger of becoming NEET and work with them at an early stage to avoid the progression to NEET.

We have a strong track record in community development and we are reviewing the way that we work with families and communities, alongside St Edmundsbury, for a joined up approach across West Suffolk.

A Families and Early Years summit held in February built on the council's groundbreaking scrutiny review of educational attainment, and suggests that being more proactive in supporting communities would be welcome. Therefore, a new approach has been developed which focuses on:

- empowering strong communities, that lead on the services they require and better integrated service provision; and
- promoting family resilience through an integrated approach between the community, councils and other partners.

We will be building on the outcomes of our Families and Early Years summit and continue to work with our communities to translate this approach into actions.

Objective 3: Attract inward investment and revitalising our high streets as a vibrant part of our towns

The Mildenhall and District Museum project is a significant development enabling the museum to become a facility that local people can be proud of and attracts visitors to the area. The council has contributed £800,000 to the total cost of the £1.274 million project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The completion date is expected to be early summer 2013 and an official opening is planned for autumn 2013. The major aspects of the development include:

- physical changes to the building to enlarge it by 65% and improve access for people with a disability;
- a new display of the Lakenheath Warrior collection which has never before been on public display;
- improvements to the care of the museum's collections and to make them more accessible to the public;

- creating new professional displays to engage and improve public access, representing Mildenhall's diverse history; and
- new public spaces and facilities, including a new community flexi-space for small temporary exhibitions, talks, school visits or practical workshops and a new bespoke area for researchers.

We have also been working with Visit East Anglia to promote Suffolk, especially West Suffolk, as a visitor destination including:

- liaising with visitor attractions and local hoteliers in and around Newmarket to deliver the Newmarket Experience;
- promoting Suffolk Walking 2013;
- delivery of The Suffolk Visitor Guide 2013;
- installing Brandon Town Centre mapping displays in and around the town's car parks, train station and on the market place; and
- developing and installing two Riverside Walks including fixed display panels.

We have supported five local companies with their plans to create schemes which will help boost local tourism, such as caravan pitches

Case study:

During 2012/13 significant progress was made on the Home of Horseracing project. An agreement to lease has been signed between Forest Heath, the Home of Horseracing Trust and the National Horseracing Museum, which commits all parties to the delivery of a world class heritage centre to include the relocation of the National Horseracing Museum, a permanent home for the British Sporting Arts Trust and a live horse exhibition space, run by the Retraining of Racehorses Trust. The project has almost completed its fundraising target of £15 million (of which the council provided £1.3 million) and procurement has been initiated for construction of the centre. Subject to funds being secured, it is planned that construction will start in the summer of 2013.



Palace House, Newmarket, part of the Home of Horseracing Project

with the provision of a shop for spares and repairs and the sale of caravans; healthy walks, a petting farm and play area; and bed and breakfast accommodation. We have provided advice on planning applications and grant applications and work with partners for advice, support and funding opportunities.

In this year we have developed and supported a number of popular events through the area, often in partnership, some of the highlights have included:

- the Queen's Diamond Jubilee events in Newmarket;
- the Olympic torch through Newmarket (see the Community Development section below for more information);
- celebrating the 600th anniversary of Mildenhall Market Charter;
- a Brandon Christmas Fayre; and
- a Newmarket Family Christmas Day.

Our historic buildings grants are aimed at helping with repairs to listed buildings or buildings in conservation areas. In 2012/13 we awarded seven grants totalling £5389 to properties in Newmarket, Brandon, Beck Row and Worlington. We have also awarded grants

to nine locations across Newmarket, Mildenhall and Lakenheath for the improvement of shop fronts totalling £3575.

We have been consulting on a wider pedestrianisation scheme in Wellington Street, Newmarket, which is dependent upon The Guineas Centre expansion plans. We are expecting to be able to publish a delivery programme in 2013/14.



Priority 2. Housing

Aim: Meeting the district's housing needs

- Objective 1: Provide adequate provision in our planning policy framework to meet current and future housing needs
- Objective 2: Help manage the district's existing housing stock
- Objective 3: Use our influence to bring empty homes back into use

Why was this a priority in 2012/13?

Forest Heath's housing needs are increasing; the numbers on our housing register are growing steadily and the number of homeless households is also on the increase. Our growing population will need more homes by 2031. We are working to increase the housing supply through our local plan, by bringing empty homes back into use and ensuring that housing is used in the best way possible.

Objective 1: Provide adequate provision in our planning policy framework to meet current and future housing needs

It is important that our policies and plans support the number of new houses needed in the district. During the year we have consulted on preferred sites for new developments and used this to inform an issues and options report in July 2012. Following this, six exhibitions were held and we were pleased to receive 230 representations from residents, parish councils and people who work in the area. The responses received are being considered and will help shape the proposed submission consultation (final stage of consultation) which will take place in autumn 2013.



Our Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is being developed jointly with St Edmundsbury. The target for affordable housing in new developments is 30% on sites of ten dwellings or more and 20% on smaller schemes of five to nine dwellings in villages. The SPD, along with the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, provides guidance to developers on our affordable housing requirements in terms of the dwellings to be delivered, mix, tenure and design.

Since the adoption of the Core Strategy, Forest Heath is achieving the full 30% through its affordable housing policy. Despite the current economic climate, during the year we are very pleased to have delivered 45 new affordable dwellings across four locations in the district. We have been holding regular update meetings with Registered Housing Providers to look at the needs of the district and to ensure that providers have capacity to fulfil those needs.

We are in a difficult economic climate and therefore the viability of schemes will be questioned more frequently by landowners and developers. The council requires an open book approach to figures produced by developers to properly assess viability when considering applications.

We have been active in supporting communities in helping shape their local area. In partnership with the Prince's Foundation for Building Community, Suffolk County Council and the Newmarket Town Council, we held a series of stakeholder sessions and public meetings in Newmarket to engage people with an interest in the town. A vision for Newmarket will result which balances the need for homes, jobs, leisure, horseracing, industry and local amenities. This work will protect Newmarket for future generations and enable its growth in a planned and sustainable way.

Objective 2: Help manage the district's existing housing stock

In recognition of the Localism Act we have developed a Tenancy Strategy which sets out guidance for Registered Housing Providers throughout the district. The benefit will be to provide greater flexibility when issuing tenancies, which will allow for movement in the housing stock when the circumstances of a person or family change.

During 2012/13 we adopted a joint West Suffolk Housing Assistance Policy. The policy offers a range of grants to help disadvantaged residents to continue to live independently in their homes. The grants range from disabled facilities grants (to help disabled residents suitably adapt their home) through to improvement grants to make homes safe and warm.

Many of the grants are delivered with the help of the Suffolk Home Improvement Agency, a service that is specifically designed for vulnerable residents with essential needs. We work closely with the agency to continually improve the services offered to residents. In 2012/13 296 Forest Heath households were able to adapt and improve their homes.

A Suffolk-wide 'Warmer Homes Healthier People' project was also launched, designed to help vulnerable residents install energy efficiency measures in their homes. We were successful in obtaining £400,000 of funding to deliver the scheme across West Suffolk, and this

has complemented the council's own housing assistance programme.

A full review of housing grants will be carried out in 2013/14, which will determine the approach we will take to delivering this priority across West Suffolk. It will provide a comprehensive strategy on how we manage demand for housing assistance, including partners and stakeholders, to ensure that grants are offered to those residents in most need.

Alongside these initiatives, Suffolk local authorities and their partners secured £315,000 of external funding from the Department of Health and £165,000 from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) during 2012/13 in support of our winter fuel poverty programmes.

We have also actively participated in the Department of Health funded Warm Homes Healthy People programme over the last two winters. The aim is to reduce excess winter mortality and illness (particularly in older people), caused by cold homes. Up to the end of March 2013, over 158 households have received a free energy survey with 84 homes being referred for loft or cavity wall insulation. The Suffolk-wide partnership was represented at over 18 neighbourhood roadshows and 16 other targeted events run with the Rural Coffee Caravan charity on behalf of the project. The programme will continue to operate in 2013/14.

In addition, we have improved the properties of 74 Forest Heath households (excluding Disabled Facilities Grants), through essential work to remove serious hazards, including heating and insulation, that has been grant aided to make homes safer and warmer.

We continue to work with landlords and have used our powers under housing and public health legislation to help bring up to standard 46 Forest Heath households in the private rented sector. We know that some of the worst conditions can be found in this sector, and we proactively inspect larger houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) to ensure that the requirements are being met for the safety and wellbeing of the tenants. Last year 32 Forest

Heath HMOs were inspected as part of our annual programme.

In 2010, the Government announced its intention to localise support for Council Tax in order to give councils a greater stake in the economic future of their local areas and to align the systems of benefits and discounts. While this reduced Council Tax support by 10%, it was designed to protect the most vulnerable and incentivise those who are able to return to work.

With St Edmundsbury, we consulted on how the new system should work including asking local people how the 10% financial saving should be met. As a result we have developed our scheme which we introduced in April 2013. The change to empty homes discounts will incentivise more owners to bring properties into use as soon as possible.

We have established the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership to operate across St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath, which is an innovative way of helping those in need to access housing in the private sector. The partnership operates in a commercial way to support those who are in need of housing to find suitable accommodation whilst helping landlords sustain tenancies, maximise income and reduce void times. We are pleased to report that up to 40 households have been supported through this scheme across West Suffolk.

Our Choice Based Lettings Scheme continues to operate, as a way of housing people on the housing register, across the Cambridge sub-region. In response to a change in Government policy we have been proactive in ensuring that, through the West Suffolk Lettings Policy, we are compliant with the changes about who is given priority to be placed on the housing register and the size of the property for which they can claim benefit. This review also presented an excellent opportunity to consider any other changes that might be necessary following the four years that the Home-Link Choice Based Lettings Scheme had been operating. The Policy continues to help those seeking social housing in West Suffolk to decide where they would like to live and to find a home that meets their needs; whilst ensuring that we, together with St Edmundsbury, can

consider the needs of applicants and make the best use of available housing.

Objective 3: Use our influence to bring empty homes back into use

We provide targeted advice and support to owners of empty properties to support them to bring them back into use.

We carry out extensive work to ensure that homes in the borough are used in the best way possible. We also actively contact the private sector landlords about homes not in use.

Our joint Empty Homes Strategy with St Edmundsbury is informing our approach to bring empty properties in the district back into use. As at the end of March 2013, 204 homes have been empty for more than 12 months. We have our grant for homes that need to be improved to meet the decent home standard which will allow these to be rented out to vulnerable households seeking rented accommodation. Through our intervention we are very pleased to report that since October 2012 approximately 40 long term empty properties have been brought back into use.

We are also prioritising those properties that require further action and considering what enforcement can be taken to ensure that these homes are made available for much needed housing.

Priority 3. Community development

Aim: Stronger, more active communities

- Objective 1: Increase the level and quality of community participation in decisions
- Objective 2: Strengthen and support parish councils and community and voluntary groups across the district
- Objective 3: Work with the community and partners to help meet the needs of Brandon residents

Why was this a priority in 2012/13?

The active involvement of communities is essential for the future development and improvement of the district. We want to do more to support community and voluntary activity across the district and help those that want to use the new powers in the Localism Act to strengthen and grow their communities.

Objective 1: Increase the level and quality of community participation in decisions

We have an active database of community groups and where they are currently operating. We are using this information to identify the level of support communities may need and where there are gaps across the district.

We provide outreach opportunities and work with schools in the Newmarket area to support the refurbishment of play areas.

We continue to liaise with children and young people to develop projects with them. We attended an assembly at Glade Primary School to discuss plans to build a new play area in neighbouring Yew Drive with the children. They were then provided with a consultation document asking them to tick their two preferred types of play equipment and to draw a picture of their idea of a play area. This information was provided to potential contractors during the tender process. Scheme designs were presented to the children and their views formed part of the tender scoring matrix.

We are putting in place new arrangements for residents to access services and for the council to communicate with residents. Our new Customer Access Strategy for West Suffolk is at the heart of the councils' shared services development and will transform

customer access to the council and our services. Fundamental to this change will be to ensure that customers are able to find the information they need easily and quickly. We will have much more to say about these changes in the future. As part of this work we are addressing the need for more proactive communications, through text message alerts for example, and the increased use of our website and new technology for servicing customer transactions. We recognise that some customers prefer to speak to the council on the telephone and face-to-face and of course this option will remain and be improved.

The opening hours of all customer access locations in the district have been reviewed and some changes have been made with the aim of ensuring that customer demands are met, whilst identifying some savings.

In 2012/13 we have made some important changes to our Town and Parish Forum, refocusing agendas on topics of interest identified by members. The format has evolved into a more engaging and dynamic process resulting in action plans developed by the parishes themselves. The Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) principles are being applied to the Forum as a way of solving community problems. ABCD builds on the skills of local residents and associations and draws on existing strengths to develop stronger and sustainable communities for the future. We

will embed these methods across the district in the future.

Objective 2: Strengthen and support parish councils and community and voluntary groups across the district

The package of new community rights, introduced by the Government in 2012 included the Community Right to Bid (or Assets of Community Value) and the Community Right to Challenge. The rights are aimed at giving local people more power over what happens in their neighbourhoods by either bidding to take over the running of a council service, or by having more time to bid to buy local buildings or pieces of land when they become available for sale.

Forest Heath was among the first councils in the country to put new arrangements in place to support local community groups in submitting bids or expressions of interest under the new community rights. New webpages were produced and community groups informed of the new arrangements through the parish forum. To date, no expressions of interest have been received under the Community Right to

Challenge. One listing was made under the Community Right to Bid.

We are pleased to report that 2012/13 was a fantastic year for volunteering in Forest Heath. We have been actively recruiting and training volunteers to carry out a number of roles as part of the Community Champions Volunteer Scheme who have assisted at the following events:

- 64 Community Champions helped marshal the route when the Olympic Torch visited Newmarket in July. The event attracted well over 15,000 people to the town centre. There has been continued support from volunteers at mass participation events across the district;
- five Community Champions regularly help to run the Healthy Heath Programme which encourages young people to eat healthily and be physically active; and
- over 840 hours of volunteering have taken place across the district's countryside sites conducting vital management works on sites including Aspal Close and the Red Lodge Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The Olympic Torch relay in Newmarket



Volunteers at a Clear Up Day, Brandon



At present 225 volunteers are registered with the scheme and they are offered regular volunteering opportunities. Training is given to volunteers wishing to develop skills, such as that delivered to the Healthy Heath Champions. Sports Club Coach education training was provided to a further ten volunteers. We will continue to promote the Community Champion Scheme and work to offer volunteers more opportunities.

Our Member Locality Budget scheme was launched in this year. Each Councillor was allocated a budget of £2500 to be given to community groups in their ward. The aim of the funding is to support projects or activities that will improve the community or environment and enhance the quality of life for our residents. In 2012/13 43 projects have been supported with £27,470 funding.

Some of the projects that have been supported this year include:

- Village newsletters in Beck Row and Icklingham;
- providing audio and visual equipment for Herringswell Village Hall to increase the range of events that can be booked;
- floodlights for Kennett Youth Football Club pitch to extend the use of the facility;
- hand tools and protective equipment for Red Lodge Conservation Group;
- Newmarket Rugby Club for the development of the inaugural inter-schools rugby competition;
- support for Friends of Brandon Station;
- safety netting for Mildenhall Football Club; and
- support for Music Builds Communities in Exning.

We are working in partnership with Cando Communities and Little Buds Pre-School to secure the future use of Studlands Park Community Centre in Newmarket. A business case is being drawn up which will ultimately see the building being operated by the pre-school on a long-term lease. The pre-schools are themselves the best people to operate the facility, being able to put a programme in place which best suits the needs of their community,

essentially offering a building run by the community for the community.

In December 2012 the West Suffolk Partnership launched the West Suffolk Network. The Network provides everyone with an interest in West Suffolk the chance to meet, share best practice, raise concerns, provide feedback and influence the work of the Partnership. Over 60 people representing 40 organisations from across West Suffolk attended. Feedback on the event was very positive and over 20 attendees volunteered to become more actively involved in the work of the Network.

We have played an active role on the Health and Wellbeing Board and in the task and finish groups which underpin the work of the Board. These efforts resulted in West Suffolk having considerable influence over the content of the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Strategy has recently been approved with text from the West Suffolk consultation response being incorporated in the final version.

We have an active role in promoting healthier lifestyles. A wide range of council services, from

Case study:

The St John's Community Centre Improvement Scheme is a partnership between Orbit Housing, the Keystone Development Trust and Forest Heath. It was recognised that the existing community centre was no longer fit for purpose. This new scheme includes the provision of a new community centre, 18 affordable houses and private rented houses. The community centre will be run by Keystone. We have transferred the land to enable the development to take place and made a capital contribution of £445,000 towards the £2.68 million project. This is a very exciting scheme for the area which will provide much needed facilities and housing.



Brandon's market place

housing to economic development, support the delivery of the four outcomes adopted by the Health and Wellbeing Board, which are:

- **Outcome 1** – Every child in Suffolk has the best start in life;
- **Outcome 2** – Suffolk residents have access to a healthy environment and take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing;
- **Outcome 3** – Older people in Suffolk have a good quality of life; and
- **Outcome 4** – People in Suffolk have the opportunity to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

There are exciting developments planned for the St John's Centre in Mildenhall as we are now moving ahead to replace the community centre with a modern fit-for-purpose facility. This scheme would not be possible without working in partnership and as the case study below shows, there are additional benefits too.

Objective 3: Work with the community and partners to help meet the needs of Brandon residents

The council has been a big supporter of the 'old school' site project in Brandon's market place. This project led by Suffolk County Council has involved a small scale land swap between Forest Heath and the County Council. Together with grant aid from Forest Heath, the people of Brandon are set to get a brand new facility. This will bring together the council's customer access point, the library and the Police Safer Neighbourhood Team all on one site together with a children's centre and pre-school. This exciting development is set to open in summer 2013.

Priority 4. Efficient and effective council

Aim: Maintaining quality services

Objective: Ensuring value for money

Why was this a priority for 2012/13?

By being a low spending, low council tax authority we have managed our finances prudently and delivered value for money, quality services. We are determined to maintain these standards.

Objective: Ensuring value for money

We are pleased to report that council Tax was frozen this year for the third time in five years with Forest Heath again having the lowest rate across Suffolk.

There are important changes being introduced for business rates. As part of the new Business Rates Retention scheme, which came into effect on 1 April 2013, the council will, for the first time, be able to retain a proportion of the business rates it collects; as well as a proportion of any growth generated. In addition to this we have signed up to a "Suffolk Pool" which should enable us to take advantage of growth across the county. The forecasted income from the scheme has been built into our financial plans and as such will be closely monitored as part of the ongoing financial reporting arrangements.

We are pleased to be a partner in an exciting new project in Mildenhall where the opportunity exists to bring together a range of public services on to one site, making customer access easier and cutting costs. Mildenhall is well-served by public facilities, but many buildings are either coming to the end of their planned lives, or need major investment. As the town expands, demand for these facilities will increase. The possibility of creating a 'Mildenhall Hub' is therefore currently being explored.

We are working with Mildenhall College, Mildenhall Swimming Pool and the Dome (Anglia Community Leisure) on this project. Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Constabulary and those who provide health and library facilities in the town will be involved in the

discussions over the coming months as will any other interested partners. We are already sharing the Mildenhall offices with Suffolk County Council's Children and Young People Service and in Newmarket we share our customer access office with the Registrar.

We reported earlier on the 'old school' project in Brandon which is due to open in June 2013 and will provide an excellent facility for the area. This will allow our existing Brandon office to be closed and used for other purposes.

In 2011 we made a capital investment in solar panels on our buildings to cut energy use and carbon emissions and benefit from Feed-in Tariffs (FITs). Systems were fitted to four of our properties comprising College Heath Road Offices, Newmarket and Brandon leisure centres and Mildenhall Depot. In their first year, the systems have generated around 115,000kWh of electricity with a gross value of £64,000 along with a CO2 saving of approximately 83 tonnes. At the end of the latest full reporting year, 2011/12, we had achieved a 37% reduction in CO2 emissions.

Essential replacement of the heating system in our Mildenhall Offices took place at the end of 2012. While it is too early to evaluate the savings this will achieve, we are confident the installation of the new fuel efficient boiler and changes to the overall heating and ventilation system will meet our target.

We have been working to improve the cost effectiveness of our services. This has included a review of our car parks and in 2012 a new car park management strategy was developed.



This addresses the key issues we have been faced with and particularly those in relation to the Guineas car park where we can now move forward with an agreed programme. This includes long stay provision on the top floor and the improvements needed in safety, security and access.

In line with our policy we review our fees and charges annually and this year they have risen with inflation. As part of the shared service re-structure they will be reviewed again.

We have made significant progress on the shared services restructure with St Edmundsbury. This has been on-going and in this year we saw the positive step of appointing the Joint Leadership Team of a new Chief Executive, two directors and nine Heads of Service. The councils jointly expect to make annual cashable savings in the region of £870,000 from the management restructure. The restructure of individual services will be completed in 2013/14. The shared services restructure is expected to achieve total savings of £2.3 million across both councils. In addition we have made further savings of £100,000.

A single pay and reward package has been agreed between Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury. The councils worked closely and effectively with Unison in negotiating the new Pay and Reward Strategy, which was overwhelmingly supported through the ballot

of Unison members. We now have a single pay structure for everybody, along with common terms and conditions that are affordable and fair for the future. The package underpins our commitment to be a joint West Suffolk organisation of staff who are valued and rewarded appropriately during difficult budget times. The proposals modernise our pay and conditions package and at the same time we modernise our organisation's management and staffing structure.

As of 1 February 2013 the West Suffolk ICT Team have been responsible for the provision of Information Communication Technology (ICT) services for the whole of the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP). The team are providing full ICT Support which includes ICT infrastructure and development, application and desktop support and telephony support via the ICT helpdesk. This arrangement has enabled the West Suffolk ICT team to reduce its overall running costs for Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury by contributing towards the teams management costs.

A joint Chief Executive for the two leisure trusts: Abbeycroft Leisure and Anglia Community Leisure, was appointed in February 2013. This will enable the West Suffolk councils to work with a single leader of our strategic leisure delivery partners and maximise opportunities to provide a quality sport, health and fitness offer.

The future

Our strategic plan was ambitious but already in the first year we have achieved a great deal, and by working with others, particularly our neighbour St Edmundsbury Borough Council, we have continued to deliver services and support communities, whilst facing challenging economic circumstances.

In 2013/14, we will continue to find ways to shape and deliver our priorities. Our plans for the future will be set out in a new Corporate Plan which will be published later this year. Importantly, the new Corporate Plan will be supported by a robust and sustainable financial plan.

2013/14 Portfolio holders and responsibilities

FHDC Cabinet	Responsibilities
Leader James Waters	No portfolio
Economic development and tourism David Bowman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic growth, skills development • Asset and property management • Markets and town centres • Tourism policies and services • Promoting and marketing the district as open for businesses • LEPs and other external bodies associated with Economic Development
Environment and waste (Deputy leader) Nigel Roman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Health functions including food safety, environmental and noise pollution • Refuse collection, recycling, street cleaning, grass cutting • Other public amenities, such as public toilets, Travellers sites • Protection of the environment • Contaminated land • Green issues including climate change and sustainability • Licensing policy
Families and communities Robin Millar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big Society; liaison and funding of other agencies/voluntary groups (grants) • Community development • Consultation and community engagement • Corporate communications • Localism • Equality and diversity, customer access • Children and young people including youth development and safeguarding • Educational attainment • Emergency planning • Community safety
Health, leisure and culture Warwick Hirst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic leisure • Client side – leisure facilities • Sports and sports development • Arts and arts development • Culture and entertainment • Play facilities, open spaces, management of local nature reserves • Brandon Country Park • Health and wellbeing

FHDC Cabinet	Responsibilities
Planning, housing and transport Rona Burt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic and statutory housing functions including enforcement of housing standards and grants • Homelessness, harassment and unlawful eviction legislation • Transportation and highways including car parking strategy • Street naming/numbering • Planning policies/Local plan • Planning/building control • Conservation • Property gazetteer/land charges
Resources, governance and performance Steve Edwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of general financial management and council budgets • Specific aspects of finance including treasury management, insurance • Council Tax and NDR collection, housing, relevant benefits, fraud prevention • Governance, performance management and audit • Democratic services and member support • Elections and boundary issues • Internal services including ICT, legal, payroll • Staffing issues and human resources including learning and development • Procurement • Secure business operations including health and safety, data protection, information governance, business continuity, risk management, transparency, Freedom of information • General property maintenance, car parks

