
Council



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Title:	Leader's Statement	
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1. Firstly, I would like to thank everyone involved in the very lengthy Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire devolution saga and negotiations. While the latest development is disappointing for the many who welcomed the prospect of such significant additional funding for Suffolk and Norfolk, there is still a chink of light as we know that Suffolk's record for collaborative, and indeed innovative, working is recognised by the Government. While actually securing the deserved results for this – and negotiating a different deal with Government for our residents and businesses – may now take further time and work we have learned a tremendous amount over the past year or so. I have no doubt this experience will help us greatly as we work on a new proposal. Meanwhile, I pay tribute to the considerable efforts by so many West Suffolk staff and councillors to date and remain both hopeful and confident that our work will not be wasted.
2. I would also like to say a huge 'thank you' to all of those involved over very many years in a project which is finally coming to fruition and is being hailed as 'a flagship scheme for the east'. I refer, of course, to the opening of the first stage of the Eastern Relief Road, on the edge of Bury St Edmunds. This success, one we should truly celebrate, is due to the foresight of both former and current councillors and officers who saw the potential of the Suffolk Business Park and knew that this road was needed to make it a reality. Getting it built has been a long, hard road of a different kind and our thanks must go to many at St Edmundsbury, again over many years, who have battled through labyrinthine administrative, lobbying, legal and funding processes. This road, when it is finally completed next year, is crucial to delivering many new homes, inward investment, and thousands of jobs

(amongst so many other good things) so I am not surprised the Anglia LEP Managing Director Chris Starkie referred to it as a 'flagship scheme'.

3. You will recall that both Suffolk Business Park and Haverhill Research Park were accepted as Enterprise Zones. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has recently announced it is seeking bids, through Local Enterprise Partnerships, for commercial support grants which could be used for advice on operational land and property use, marketing and financial research. We are exploring what benefits this could bring for West Suffolk.
4. This council's agenda has us considering a number of items which are further examples of the excellent way that St Edmundsbury, alongside our Forest Heath neighbour, is working. In these challenging times – and I'm sure that word 'challenging' will describe our working environment for the foreseeable future – we must continue to look at different ways to maintain, and indeed improve, services for the communities we serve. While uncertain times continue, we do at least have certainty about our Revenue Support Grant (and how it will be reducing!) as the Government has agreed a four-year settlement. This means we can now confidently focus on a sustainable medium term and the best possible position to face both the opportunities and challenges ahead (including business rates retention). Behaving more commercially and exploring new funding models so that we can continue to invest in our communities will remain our key financial themes to help secure the future wellbeing and prosperity of our residents.
5. One example of this is our changing, but still very close, relationship with Abbeycroft Leisure, set up by St Edmundsbury in 2005 to run our leisure centres along with outreach and sport development programmes. Under the excellent leadership of Warren Smyth Abbeycroft has thrived, building confidence in its ability to deliver West Suffolk's required outcomes and to create its own income-generating schemes. It now operates 12 facilities attracting in excess of 1.6 million visits, employs 450 staff and has successfully run a number of very high profile local and international events. We pay a management fee each year to Abbeycroft to help deliver our objectives around sport and leisure. The investment we will be considering during this council meeting could pave the way for substantially reducing that fee while delivering these objectives – indeed, I hope eventually that we, and our Council Tax payers, will not have to pay any management fee at all.
6. I am extremely pleased to see the Barley Homes business plan on our agenda – another step on our journey towards getting our new housing company up and running swiftly and successfully. The business plan should show that the concept is viable and will provide both a source of income for the council as well as new – and the right kind of – homes. It's a starting point, with full details further down the line going to the councillors who will be representing the interests of the two West Suffolk councils, and those we serve, on the shareholder group. Councillors will remember that we approved the housing company's governance last year and, if we agree to the proposal

before us, the council's role in future years will be to receive annual reports, as with any business in the commercial world.

7. Not on this council agenda, but very much in our minds, is how we can help our residents and town centre users as they battle the increasing nuisance of illegal and inconsiderate parking (often, for example, forcing people with pushchairs or wheelchairs into traffic on the road to get past). Sadly there is very little at present that we, as a council, can do about this because we do not have the legal powers. These currently rest with the police, although they no longer receive any funding for it from the Government and focus their resources on their perceived areas of highest risk. The Suffolk Public Sectors Leaders (SPSL) Group has been working on a countywide solution to this problem. We can take on that police responsibility, Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE), but it is a lengthy technical, legal and costly process. That said, and following our last SPSL meeting, I am now confident that we have all agreed how to finance this. We expect to get through all the democratic and legal processes and have CPE in place by April 2019. In the meantime I hope that drivers will give some more thought for those put at risk by their illegal behaviour (and that the police will enforce this), especially at this time of year when our streets are busy with Christmas shoppers.
8. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank every councillor and member of staff for their commitment and hard work over this past year. I hope you have an enjoyable and relaxing Christmas break and send you every best wish for a happy, prosperous and successful New Year....you certainly deserve it!