
Council



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Budget

We are elected to represent the people and to make the tough decisions and I acknowledge that on the face of it, we have a tough decision when we look at our budget tonight. We have managed to freeze Council Tax for the last seven years but we now need to acknowledge the role that Council Tax plays in delivering valuable frontline services. This is about helping the Council to move towards local self sufficiency, using local money to help fund local services. That is why we will now be asking our Council Taxpayers for around an additional 40p a month. For all the reasons that you will hear from Cllr Edwards later tonight, I believe, that although this is by no means an easy decision, it is the right thing to do.

Mildenhall Hub

Funding for the Hub is already on tonight's agenda so I won't dwell on that in my statement. But, in terms of the design of the scheme, the pre-application consultation closed on 10 February. I went along to the public exhibition which was very well attended with lots of people eager to see what exactly is being proposed. I think it is fair to say that there were lots of people that can see the benefits of what we are collectively trying to achieve as well of course as some concerns about practical details. The reoccurring theme I heard was around traffic impact. There is already a piece of work that is looking at this in more detail as this exciting and innovative project moves forward to a planning application. So we will need to reserve our position as councillors on the planning matters until we have greater detail.

Local Plan Extension

The public consultation on what we propose to be the final version of the Forest Heath Local Plan is ongoing and that the deadline has been extended to end on 13 March.

The new date fits the timetable for adoption of the Local Plan. In the meantime people can still find out about the Local Plan proposals by entering their postcode on the 'Find my nearest' button, on our website.

Government White Paper on Housing

The Government has published a white paper which details plans for more housing to help people to afford to rent and to buy. It emphasises the need for Councils to have an up to date plan to meet housing demand, which is of course what we are moving towards as part of our timetable for the adoption of our Local Plan. I think this paper also underlines the importance of the housing company, that we, together with St Edmundsbury and Suffolk County Council, have invested in. Naturally we welcome anything that helps people to be able to get their own home whether owned or rented and we will be considering the implications of this White Paper over the next few weeks.

Staff

We have a number of senior new staff that will be joining us in the coming months. Julie Baird will be joining us from South Cambridgeshire District Council as Assistant Director for Growth, Mark Miller from Cambridgeshire County Council will be joining as our new Strategic Communications Service Manager, while Leah Mickleborough will be our new Democratic Service Manager from the end of this month and Kevin Taylor has taken up post as the new ICT manager. Finally, as of the beginning of February, Sara Lomax has taken on the role of Service Manager for Housing Options and Homelessness.