
Council



Forest Heath
District Council

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Annual Report

There have been some great achievements by Forest Heath District Council in the past year. It is easy, when we are all so busy working for our communities, to lose sight of work and projects that Forest Heath has been carrying out. So it is fantastic to see some of our success stories captured in the annual report (www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/council/achievements/index.cfm) which I hope you will take the time to read if you haven't already. I won't highlight any individual stories, they are all worthy and part of our work towards promoting economic growth, housing so that people can remain in the areas where they grew up or work, and of course our great work through our families and communities strategy, working with charities, voluntary organisations and local groups to create closer community ties and close the gap between generations to tackle all forms of isolation and support families and individuals within that.

Single Council

That leads me briefly into our public engagement over becoming a single council for West Suffolk. Through a single council will we be able to truly focus and help our communities with some of the biggest challenges that they face now and over the next decade, challenges over health, housing, infrastructure, skills and education. A single council, will give us a strong voice, championing local causes whilst remaining small enough and amongst our residents and businesses to identify and support local initiatives that will meet their needs.

It's no secret that I believe passionately that a single council is not only the right thing for us to do for our communities, but it is important that we hear from them. We have the next month to continue to engage our local residents, businesses and groups so that they can help shape the future of west Suffolk before bringing this back for a full debate in September – <http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/singlecouncil>

Mildenhall Hub

Whether or not a single council happens, we will continue to need a replacement school and leisure centre in Mildenhall, and of course a place for Councillors to hold their meetings. The Mildenhall Hub can bring all these things together on one site with a health centre, library, job centre, Citizen's Advice Bureau, council services, pre-school facilities and the police. The decision by the fire and rescue service to withdraw does not affect the viability of the scheme. The planning application has been out to initial public consultation and we await the next steps.

A11/Fiveways

On a related matter I can report that I chaired a positive meeting with regard to Highways England's short term solutions to improve the A11 Fiveways through signalling and speed reduction measures. As you will no doubt be aware, the longer term solution to safety and congestion issues at this roundabout would be to build a bypass or flyover. This is not a case of either or and we will continue to push for both of these solutions and I will keep you updated.

Electric vehicle charging/going green

On the subject of travel, we together with St Edmundsbury, have recently installed Electric Vehicle charge points at The Guineas car park in Newmarket, as well as in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill. You will be aware that there has been lots in the news recently about a push for these types of vehicles to replace petrol and diesel models. This small step helps promote that choice and makes it easier for people to opt for an Electric Vehicle, knowing that they can recharge it on average in 3-4 hours while visiting Newmarket town centre. Obviously we will monitor their use and if demand increases we can look at investing more in these charge points accordingly. I should also mention that we also offer a grant to businesses looking to install their own charge points.

Keeping with the green theme, we have installed a biomass boiler at the National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art. This reduces carbon emissions, is therefore better for the environment and better for Newmarket and part of our wider work with businesses and community organisations across West Suffolk, helping them become more energy efficient and save on energy costs.

Congratulations

I would also like to take a moment to congratulate staff at the National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art. This major visitor attraction, which opened late last year, celebrates Newmarket's heritage and forms part of our wider strategy to boost footfall and spending in Newmarket town centre. Yes they were pipped at the post for the Museum of the Year award, but to be shortlisted and in the running for such a prestigious title less than a year after opening takes some doing and deserves recognition.

Welcome

Finally, I would like to formally welcome Councillor Simon Cole to the Conservative Group. He has always given strong but considered opinions during his time as leader

of the West Suffolk Independents and I look forward to him continuing to give his invaluable insight as part of the Conservative Group.