
Council



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Title:	Leader's Statement	
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Documents attached:	None	

Councillor Bob Cockle

1. I am sorry not to be able to attend this Council meeting but am sure everyone will join me in wishing Councillor Bob Cockle, a former mayor, well after following his recent resignation. Councillor Cockle has served this Council and his residents diligently and well, making incisive (and often amusing!) contributions to our debates with Bury St Edmunds in particular and our communities at the forefront of his mind.

Single Council

2. Government has announced this month that we, together with Forest Heath District Council, will be going forward to create a new single council for West Suffolk. This is an exciting time and the next chapter in transforming local Government here in West Suffolk and nationally. We will be creating a new council to help us better serve our communities and businesses as well as deliver the vision and strategic aims we agreed before Christmas. There is still much to do and I have been heartened by the good cross party and council working to get us this far and hopefully continue in the future. Government has praised us not only for the strength of our case but the speed at which we have moved. For that I would like to thank all councillors and staff that have made this possible and know the new Council will build on the excellent achievements both Councils have made.

Budget

3. Despite the challenges faced by Councils across the UK our proposed budget manages to freeze council tax in St Edmundsbury while protecting services and even helping us invest in our communities. I am proud that in these times, we are able to propose a budget that will not only continue

to deliver excellent services and bring prosperity but continue our journey in being a transformational council.

West Suffolk Growth Investment Strategy

4. We are a national success story, something Government has recognised in talking to us about a new single council. Part of that success has been our decision to look at the best way to meet the financial challenges, protect services and invest in our communities. This has seen us investing and managing growth to not only provide income but also social and economic benefits for our communities and businesses. Some councils have been forced to cut services while we are not only protecting ours but helping to create jobs, homes and prosperity. The Investment Strategy that is being debated today is an important tool in achieving that and meeting our budget in the future.

Suffolk Business Park Growing

5. Planning permission has been granted for a number of key local employers on Suffolk Business Park and plans for the development of these businesses are progressing well with new applications being approved recently. This has been brought forward through the support of the Council and I am really pleased that major employers have chosen to invest in Bury St Edmunds as the home for their UK headquarters. In April last year Treatt PLC, one of the world's longest established ingredient solutions providers to the flavour, fragrance and personal care industries, gained Outline planning consent for their new headquarters building on the western part of the park. Building on that success, before Christmas, Servest gained permission to expand into a new headquarters and operational centre for their facilities management and services operations. As a part of its growing portfolio of opportunities, Servest has consent to build a new style of coffee shop, their first in the country. This will be located close to the re-modelled junction 45 on the A14 Trunk Road. Servest currently has temporary accommodation on several sites around the town and the new facility enables the expansion and growth of the business. In addition, the high quality power tool company Festool recently gained permission to relocate its headquarters and service centre to Suffolk Business Park close to the Servest headquarters building on the eastern side of the park. Others are in the pipeline and shows the success of investing in our economy.
6. While the Business Park is growing in terms of tenants I was also privileged to help plant the first tree as part of a £175,000 landscaping contract at the 114 acre Suffolk Park. Not only does this help protect and enhance our local environment but makes it a much nicer place to work and attract business. The Borough Council provided the £3 million loan to the developer to enable road infrastructure and landscaping to take place.

Working with our youngsters

7. I am proud of what our youngsters do in West Suffolk. Sometimes they get a bad press but actually our local media are always keen to show our young people in the best light. This year has seen some great examples of where we and other local organisations have worked with or supported youngsters doing good in our community.

8. A community arts project which saw school students collaborate with market traders and St Edmundsbury Borough Council, has won a national award. Pupils from St Benedict's Catholic School in Bury St Edmunds led by local artist Lou Gridley, worked with the Council to organise a market themed community puppet parade during Love Your Local Market Fortnight last May. Students ran a market stall offering free flag making workshops for people to wave during the parade, and returned to sell arts and crafts at two more markets. Now the initiative has been named Best Market Event in the Great British Market Awards held by The National Association of British Market Authorities.
9. Children from two schools planted flowers as part of a project to create of a new community area where people can meet, sit and relax. Children from Tollgate Primary School and County Upper School planted the flowers in the seating area of the St Olaves Shopping Precinct on the Howard Estate. The Howard Estate Association of Residents and Tenants (HEART) led the project to revitalise the area which was also backed by us, the County Council, Bury in Bloom and Tesco. Thank you to all involved in this.
10. In addition, it was poignant to see the Holocaust Memorial Service held in Abbey Gardens in January. The snowdrops in the memorial garden were planted by students from Guildhall Feoffment Primary School planted who also sang on the day with a representative from from King Edward VI CEVC School.

Gender Pay Gap

11. A report will soon be coming to Cabinet at which time we can look at the details but our initial figures are very positive and show that on average women earn slightly over what men do in St Edmundsbury – effectively we currently have no Gender Pay Gap. Once again our Council is leading the way on an issue that the country is grappling with.

Bardwell – Village of the Year

12. We all know West Suffolk is a beautiful place to live and full of communities that look out for one another. So it was good to see Bardwell beat hundreds of other places across the country to be featured on the popular Channel 4 programme UK Village of the Year. I hope Councillor Andrew Smith will pass on our praise to the Parish Council and local groups who attracted the cameras with their bid highlighting that Bardwell is a beautiful place to live with a thriving community spirit and plenty of activities.

West Suffolk Hospital rated as outstanding

13. Congratulations to our partners and staff at West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust after receiving the highest rating of outstanding from the Care Quality Commission. The Bury St Edmunds based hospital is one of just seven general hospitals in England and the only one in the Midlands and East region to hold that achievement. Well done, and our thanks to all the staff and volunteers at the hospital that serve the residents of West Suffolk and provide such outstanding care. We work closely with our NHS colleagues and have our own role to play in helping support the health

and wellbeing of our communities through services such as leisure, parks and providing the right sort of housing. Indeed I spotted our mayor, Councillor Clements and Councillor Hind on YouTube showing off their skills at the launch of new Walking Football sessions in Bury St Edmunds as part of our work with Abbeycroft Leisure to keep people fit and healthy.

Community Spirit

14. West Suffolk has always been a place where neighbours and friends look out for one another. This has again been proven by the tremendous response we have had from school pupils, businesses, organisations and individuals who have all been donating to the winter night shelter in Bury St Edmunds. West Suffolk councils working with Havebury Housing Partnership set up a winter night shelter at Northgate Lodge shortly before Christmas. Prior to that we had operated an emergency winter shelter with the support of the Garland Street Baptist Church, during which time it was inundated with people wanting to know how they could help. The Council, Havebury and Tayfen House received public donations of bedding, toiletries and other items that have been used by the people using the night shelter. Thank you to all those who have and continue to support us and our partners in giving donations. I would also like to thank our staff who are working so hard to support those needing homes.

Supporting Landlords

15. We have launched several initiatives this year to support landlords in West Suffolk. We and our partners are keen to work with landlords to ensure the availability and suitability of homes to meet growing demand. January saw the launch of the West Suffolk Landlords Forum to help provide support. Private landlords play an important part in helping meet our local housing need. So it is important that we support them in practical ways such as this forum, where they can find out and keep on top of the latest changes to the law and to the benefits system, as well as how they can access the various grants available. The forum also offers landlords the chance to learn more about our own West Suffolk Lettings Partnership which runs a guaranteed rent scheme.
16. Landlords are under a lot of pressure and challenges. Which is why in our bid to support legitimate landlords we have also taken the first steps to adopting new powers to combat rogue ones. It is simply not fair that businesses who do the right thing, follow the law and invest in their properties to make sure they are at the right standards are harmed by rogue elements that do not. Vitally, we also work to support our residents and know that some of the most vulnerable can often be victims of these irresponsible landlords. The focus of the new policy is on tackling and dealing with the very worst private landlords, and deterring any bad landlords from starting to operate in West Suffolk, while working with those that wish to grow the sector through much needed, better quality housing. We have begun consultation and engagement on the new enforcement routes that provide Local Housing Authorities with the option of civil penalty fines, rent repayment orders and banning orders for non-compliance with certain offences. Enforcement remains the last option and we always prefer to provide support and advice but we can not tolerate landlords operating outside the law.