

Council



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Title of Report:	Recognising the History of St Edmundsbury Borough Council	
Report No:	COU/SE/19/005	
Report to and date:	Council	19 March 2019
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Purpose of report:	This is the final meeting of St Edmundsbury Borough Council. This report seeks to recognise the history and achievements of the Council, and thank those who have contributed to its work. In debating this report, Members are encouraged to put forward their own suggestions and perspectives on the work of the Council and recognise some of their fondest memories both of specific achievements of the Council and those who have helped make these achievements happen.	
Recommendation:	It is <u>RECOMMENDED</u> that Council thanks all who have contributed to the achievements of St Edmundsbury Borough Council since its formation on 1 April 1974.	
Key Decision: <i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i>	<i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Consultation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	
Alternative option(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	
Implications:		
Are there any financial implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	•

Are there any staffing implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •
Are there any ICT implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •
Are there any legal and/or policy implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •
Are there any equality implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •
Ward(s) affected:	All wards
Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>	None
Documents attached:	None

1. The Formation of St Edmundsbury Borough Council

- 1.1 In 1970, the (then) government committed to a unified, simplified two-tier structure of governance in England. As a result, major reforms were proposed to local government in Suffolk, including the abolition of West Suffolk County Council and its Districts.
- 1.2 In its place arose a new structure, with one County Council for Suffolk, and seven Districts. Original proposals saw the town of Haverhill, with surrounding villages, transferred to Cambridgeshire, however this was modified as the proposals developed and Haverhill retained within Suffolk.
- 1.3 The reform saw the creation of St Edmundsbury Borough Council, combining the former Bury St Edmunds Borough Council; Haverhill Urban District Council; Clare Rural District Council and Thingoe Rural District Council.
- 1.4 Unlike the creation of West Suffolk Council, the first elections to St Edmundsbury Borough took place in May 1973, which enabled the new Councillors to have specific responsibility to set up and establish the first Council. The first meeting took place at 6:15pm on 21 June. Councillor Colin Winsor was elected as the first Chairman.
- 1.5 In July, the Council made its first staff appointments – subject, of course, to those staff members having passed the necessary medical examinations. Following a letter from West Suffolk Newspapers Limited, it was agreed that in future, Council meetings would take place on Tuesdays, rather than Thursdays, to allow sufficient time to hit print deadlines. Mr E. Graham Thomas was appointed as the first Chief Executive.
- 1.6 In December 1973, the Council considered whether to petition for Borough Status. The vote was carried with 29 in favour, and 2 against. Whilst the Council wanted to be called “The Rural Borough of St Edmundsbury”, in February 1974, Her Majesty granted a Charter with the name “The Borough of St Edmundsbury”.
- 1.7 Prior to the new Council formally taking on powers, functions and responsibilities in 1974, it was necessary to undertake much of the same work that has recently been required to establish West Suffolk Council. Notable amongst these items was the budget, which inherited the capital programmes of the former District and Borough Councils. This included funding allocations for a new leisure complex and swimming pool in Bury St Edmunds, a swimming pool in Haverhill and a 9 hole golf course in Haverhill. The golf course was allocated £193,000 – equivalent to over £1.6m today. The new leisure complex in Bury St Edmunds was opened in 1975 by Sir Alf Ramsey.

2. The Early Years of St Edmundsbury

- 2.1 In May 1974, the first Mayor of St Edmundsbury was elected; Councillor Colin Winsor. Historically, a Councillor would serve as Mayor, then as Deputy Mayor the year after; this practice was recently reversed so that a Councillor serves as Deputy Mayor first, before becoming Mayor. In 1982, the Council elected its first female Mayor, Councillor Barbara Jennings.
- 2.2 Reviewing past records of the Council indicates the parallels with issues that are important to the Council today. The impact of government funding cuts, the impact of inflation, urban expansion and delivering sufficient, affordable housing for residents have always been prominent topics.
- 2.3 Whilst the Council had major topics to consider, it didn't look away from smaller matters, that were important to those involved – the design of the Council's tie (and scarf for female Councillors) and whether smoking should be allowed in Council meetings. One of the most interesting meetings must have taken place in December 1979 when the Governor of Highpoint Prison addressed the Council on the number of escapes from the prison, and advised Councillors on the action that should be taken by local residents if they came across escapees and the outfits that prisoners would be wearing.
- 2.4 In 1978, the Council awarded its first honorary freedom of the Borough. Lt-Gen Sir Richard Elton Goodwin, former Commander of the First Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment, Colonel of The Royal Anglian Regiment and a Deputy Lieutenant of Suffolk was awarded the status on 26 May. A full list of those awarded freedom status is available on the Council's website.
- 2.5 The challenges of the 1970's economy did not escape the Council. The national reduced working week impacted on work to establish the Council at the outset, and inflation became problematic in the later 1970's. In 1980, the Council felt it necessary to increase housing rates by 12%, and both cemetery charges and hackney carriage fares rose by 25%.
- 2.6 1980 also saw a major disaster for the Council. On 20 March, the sports and leisure centre in Bury St Edmunds burnt down, which resulted in an outpouring of public support for the facility. A sports centre lottery was created, which sold 45,454 tickets, whilst the Bury Free Press launched a fundraising appeal which raised £31,906.

3. Housing

- 3.1 The housing landscape was changing during the 1980's. In the 1960's and 1970's, St Edmundsbury, and its predecessor Councils, had entered agreements with the Greater London Council to support the influx of residents moving out of London, which resulted in high levels of growth in both Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds – the London Overspill. Towards the middle of the 1970's it was becoming apparent that there was a reduction in the demand for housing from London.

- 3.2 This combined with a change in general government policy in the 1980's towards social housing, in particular the move towards Right to Buy. The Council controlled a potentially prime site at Moreton Hall, and throughout the 1980's work was underway to support private development of housing in this area, which continues today. In the early 1990's, St Edmundsbury Borough Council constructed its final council houses.
- 3.3 In order to facilitate development, the Council had formed the Buryhill Land Company with the intention of developing sites and infrastructure to sell to commercial developers for profit. The company ceased operations in 1992, and the funds realised were able to contribute towards projects such as the Haverhill Southern Bypass, and the refurbishment of Haverhill Town Hall to create the Haverhill Arts Centre.
- 3.4 Towards the end of the 1990's, the Council begun the process to transfer its housing stock to a new Social Registered Housing Partnership. During 2001, tenants were balloted regarding the potential change; on 16 October it was confirmed that 74% of residents had turned out for the ballot, and 71.5% voted in favour. On 24 June 2002, the Council's housing stock was transferred to Havebury Housing Partnership.

4. Culture and Leisure

- 4.1 The Council has a long history of supporting culture and leisure within its area. When first formed, it inherited work to secure the future site of the Anglo-Saxon site at West Stow. In 1976, the West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village Trust was formed, and continues to this day to work to preserve this nationally significant site. The accompanying Country Park site was opened in June 1979.
- 4.2 In 1993, the Council opened the Manor House Museum, hosting the Council's important collection of arts and other works, most notably the Gershom-Parkington collection of time recording equipment. A visitor centre at the Abbey was opened temporarily, but did not prove financially viable. In 2005, the Council consolidated its collections and museums offering into the Anglo-Saxon Village and Moyse's Hall Museum despite public protest against the closure of Manor House Museum.
- 4.3 The Council has always been a crucial part of the "Bury in Bloom" team. Bury St Edmunds first entered this prestigious competition in 1987, when it was joint winner in the English large towns competition. Persistent success followed, most notably in 2000 when the town was named as the winner of Nations in Bloom for small towns.
- 4.4 Leisure Centres were an important part of the Council's service provision throughout its history. In order to support the ongoing development of the centres, in 2005 both the Bury and Haverhill leisure centres were transferred to Abbeycroft Leisure Trust, to independently manage.
- 4.5 The Council had a lengthy history in development of the Parkway and Cattle Market sites in Bury St Edmunds. Throughout the 1990's, protracted meetings were held by the Council to discuss the future of the

amalgamated sites, including a special meeting in June 1992 that lasted 7 hours and 23 minutes. In 1993, the Policy and Resources Committee agreed to purchase the cattle market site for £500,000. Following extensive discussion in 1996-7, in 1998, the Council decided to support the decision of the Planning Committee to allow for a multiplex cinema on the Parkway site, despite strong opposition. The cinema was not finally opened until 2005.

- 4.6 By this stage, plans were already progressing at pace for the redevelopment of the Cattle Market site itself. The replacement shopping complex, the Arc, opened in March 2009 including the Apex, a large world-class performance venue, which opened in October 2010.
- 4.7 Alongside these developments, the Council was working to support similar development proposals in Haverhill. In October 2008, a new 5 screen Cineworld Cinema complex and restaurants was opened in the town.
- 4.8 Whilst these developments may be more high profile, throughout its history the Council has sought to support development in its rural areas. This was formalised for the first time in 2004, with the first Rural Area Action Plan. Key projects focussed on supporting rural businesses, community transport and encouraging biodiversity. The rural area action plan was renewed in 2008, and in September 2014, the Council adopted the Rural Vision 2031. This document aims to set out a sustainable future for the Council's rural areas, the challenges they face and how they may be addressed.

5. Governance

- 5.1 Throughout the whole of the 1970's and 1980's, the Council had been Conservative controlled. In the 1990's, the political arrangements of the Council became somewhat more complex; the Council experienced periods of no overall control and changed between a Labour and Conservative administration. In 2001, the Council elected to change to a leader-executive form of governance whilst in a no overall control position, with the minority groups aligning to form the first Cabinet, a 'Rainbow' coalition
- 5.2 For much of its history, the Council had been represented by 44 councillors. In 2003, this figure was increased on review to 45, adding an additional Councillor to represent Haverhill, following recommendations from the Boundary Commission.
- 5.3 As highlighted above, government funding has been a recurrent theme in the history of the Council's decisions; however, the Council also has its own funding streams, through income generated by services and through the ratings system. In 1990, this was replaced by the Poll Tax, and whilst protest against this may not have been as significant in St Edmundsbury as in some Council areas, it was clearly unpopular. In 1993, the poll tax was replaced by Council Tax, and in February of that year, the Council set its first levy of £65.61 per Band D property.

- 5.4 In 2006, the Council committed to joining partners in a £14m project to develop a new Public Service Village on Western Way, Bury St Edmunds. This was intended to serve as a home for all of the Council's services, and County Council services and was projected to save over £700,000 per year for the partners. The site was complete in April 2009 and became West Suffolk House. It has saved over £1m a year, and the next stages of the scheme are currently being planned in the form of the 'Western Way Masterplan'.
- 5.5 Twice in the Council's history the prospect of more substantive changes in local governance has been raised. In October 1993, the Council had agreed to support proposals for a unitary council for West Suffolk; again, such proposals were made between 2008-2010 in collaboration with Forest Heath. Whilst reorganisation ultimately did not happen at that stage, the latter proposals reflected the growing relationship with Forest Heath which ultimately led to the creation of shared services and the formation of a single, shared officer structure, and a growing alignment in terms of policy and decision making.

6. The Ending of St Edmundsbury Borough Council

- 6.1 In June 2017, both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath Councils considered a draft business case to become a single council. The final case was agreed in September 2017, and on 24 May, the Government made the West Suffolk (Local Government Changes) Order which would create a new district-tier Council to replace the two former Councils. The powers and functions of the new Council was unchanged.
- 6.2 This report provides a few examples of some of the most prominent activities by St Edmundsbury Borough Council throughout its history. In practice, the Council has undertaken far more than can be recorded in this report. Reviewing records of the Council demonstrates that it has not just developed and delivered projects and programmes itself, but lobbied government and other bodies for change, and supported partners, community groups and local businesses to deliver benefits to the area.
- 6.3 The report itself is not intended to be a comprehensive record of the Council, but instead to highlight some key achievements and provide opportunity to give thanks to those who have made these happen. There are far too many individuals to name individually, but it is worth highlighting the work of the many Councillors and staff members who have served to set and deliver what the Council wants to achieve; the work of local community and residents groups to support the Council and their communities; local residents, who have consistently expressed their views to the Council – whether through supporting what it wants to do or opposing it, challenging the Council's thinking; the media, who have promoted the work of the Council and also held it to account, and our partner organisations who have worked collaboratively to benefit our local area.

- 6.4 Members are invited to briefly comment on some of their favourite memories and achievements of the Council, and those that made these achievements happen.