

Leader's statement

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Dear all,

Ukraine

1. As I write this I have just been listening to the latest news in Ukraine and the desperate plight of the people in that country, which has overshadowed almost everything for the last couple of weeks. The distressing events and pictures we see cannot fail to move any of us.
2. As ever, we, with the rest of Suffolk, stand ready to support any refugees that come to the UK and our county. The Council is both coordinating with partners and putting plans in place. These, no doubt, will require some further complex discussion and actions to support people with a range of needs, having had to leave their homes in the middle of an invasion.
3. To show our support and solidarity we have lit up the outside and box office of the Apex in the colours of the Ukraine flag. At a time when many cities and villages in Ukraine are forced to have no lights at night due to this abhorrent invasion, when innocent people and children are being killed, we wanted to have a beacon of light that shows we stand with the people of Ukraine; and ask people to do what they can to give and show their support.
4. There are many local organisations supporting the people of Ukraine and you can find out more how they can help by going to [Supporting Afghan and Ukrainian refugees | Suffolk County Council](#)
5. In addition, we of course have many friends and neighbours working on the military bases in West Suffolk and whose mission with NATO has been publicised.
6. Our bond with the bases and their personnel is very strong. Indeed, recently staff from the 100 Air Refuelling Wing volunteered to help remove 560 paving slabs from our former Mildenhall offices. These are to be used to improve access for people with disabilities and wheelchair users so they can enjoy and take part in activities at The Shed, a West Row community project.

7. I have sent a message (on behalf of us all) of thanks and support to all personnel for the work they are doing and recognising the strain that they and their families must be under in these uncertain times.

Introduction

8. The second newsletter has been sent to you all so I will not labour the points therein nor the great achievements that are highlighted in it. That said, I would like to thank everyone for their feedback which helps us evolve and improve it. We have introduced this monthly newsletter primarily to support councillors in their own wider communications to local communities and businesses about what the Council is or has been doing. I know many of you blog and use social media as well as send out newsletters in addition to briefing your local Parish and Town Councils. So, I hope this will prove useful to you. Please continue to send your views or ideas to the Communication Team.
9. I am sorry I was not able to attend our last meeting in person, but I know the debate was robust and in depth.....something our electorate expect of us on such a vital topic as the budget.
10. Now that the budget is set however, I look forward to the Council continuing to deliver on the vision we have set and the initiatives this funding unlocks.
11. In particular, I would like to highlight the environmental improvements this budget is making possible. But I also want to reflect briefly that this was something made into a reality thanks to the hard work of the cross-party taskforce that I set up when West Suffolk Council was formed. I hope those members are equally pleased as they see their work come to fruition.
12. This is also part of another example of the cross-cutting work we are doing across the county where Leaders of all authorities have joined together to make the environment a priority for all.

Sunnica

13. As I write this, I have just received the papers for the Cabinet meeting next week in Mildenhall including the serious concerns we have about the proposed Sunnica Energy Farm.
14. This very large, proposed site spans land in both West Suffolk and East Cambridgeshire. While we understand and indeed support the need for improving green and sustainable energy, we also have a duty to balance that with many other considerations, including planning policies and the needs of our communities.
15. I, of course, will leave my own thoughts to the debate and look forward to hearing the advice of our planning officers as well as views of our local residents and communities. But it perhaps highlights the kind of decisions we face as councillors not just on this proposal but others as we continue to put

our own Local Plan together to meet the current and future needs of our residents and businesses.

16. In talking to colleagues following the last Council meeting, I also want to echo a point that was made in reference to the Local Plan specifically about Brandon. We all know how Brandon has been calling for development and of course we understand the constraints placed on that due to the habitat of the stone curlew inter alia. While changing that is not actually in our gift, I want to echo the assurances made at Council, that we are with Brandon in seeking to find a way to balance these needs. The budget that was agreed at our last Council enables us to carry on championing this cause and provide further evidence for our arguments.
17. I look forward to the debate in Mildenhall, especially as it is at the hub, which from our newsletter you will see is going from strength to strength. Indeed, it is proving the benefits of co-locating services and is illustrating the incredible rise in use compared to the separate previous facilities it replaced. Importantly the bond between health and leisure is working very well and we are also seeing a huge up-tick in the amount of people using the leisure facilities - all vital in our continuing to help improve the health and wellbeing of our residents throughout West Suffolk.

Supporting business

18. I also want to highlight the amazing work we have been doing as a council to make sure more than 400 businesses have been able to access the latest £1.4 million in Government grants to help combat the impact of COVID. I know this has been a mammoth task, and our thanks go to all involved. Once again, we have been at the forefront of this work.
19. The budget we have set is enabling us to further support the growth of the local economy and much needed skills improvement. We continue to forge stronger links with business groups and local councils and organisations to further ensure a more prosperous future. This also includes securing funding, such as that highlighted in the newsletter, to encourage people to shop locally.
20. I also welcome the formation of a strong new partnership formed by local organisations, including the Our Bury St Edmunds BID, to put on five days of linked festive events this year.
21. This again illustrates our ongoing work together with others, to cross boundaries, be they organisational or geographic, and work with partners, businesses, and communities to put them at the heart of decision making. It also builds wider capacity; better outcomes designed locally and helps achieve more with the resources we have.
22. The five days of events, being held from November 23 to 27, take over from the former Christmas Fayre run by the Council and will also complement the events being put on by the Abbey 1000 celebrations. They are being planned, delivered, and funded by the new Christmas in Bury St Edmunds Partnership with the aim of delivering a set of linked entertaining, varied and safe events, with minimal disruption to residents and local businesses. Crucially it will also

provide an opportunity to showcase all that Bury St Edmunds has to offer for visitors as well as encouraging return visits throughout the year.

23. The partnership includes The Arc, Our Bury St Edmunds BID, Bury St Edmunds Town Council, St Edmundsbury Cathedral and West Suffolk Council who together will be at the heart of this to help drive forward the benefits for local traders and the community.
24. I of course, will welcome any suggestions from councillors how similar events can be supported elsewhere in West Suffolk.
25. Meanwhile, businesses have just voted in Haverhill not to have a Business Improvement District. This decision was taken democratically by local rate paying businesses (and I think as councillors we can all agree how important democracy and the electoral process is). I, with the rest of the Cabinet, very much look forward to continuing to work with all organisations and businesses in Haverhill, and of course throughout West Suffolk, on the collective goal of improving the local economy and making sure our towns and villages continue to thrive.

International Women's Day

26. This week saw the annual international women's day which also acts to remind us there is still more to be done in terms of equality; this is of course something West Suffolk Council is very conscious of, and you will see in our papers for Council we have a report on the gender pay gap.
27. Nationally, in 2019, the average pay for full time female employees was 8.9 percent lower than for full time employees. And it is good to be able to report that for the period April 2020 to March 2021, our figures here show that female employees are likely to earn slightly more.
28. International Women's Day also saw the news that the Women's Tour, Britain's biggest and longest running international women's cycling stage race, is coming back to West Suffolk and we are excited to be hosting the Stage One finish in Bury St Edmunds in June. Major events such as these also raise the profile of West Suffolk and help our local economy thrive and it will be a fantastic day for our residents, businesses, and visitors alike. But equally important, it is a great way for young cyclists to see fantastic role models for their sport and hopefully encourage them onto greater things.

Finally

29. Although COVID has certainly not gone away, and we continue to take sensible precautions I much look forward to seeing you all in the Council Chamber again.

With best wishes,

Councillor John Griffiths
Leader of West Suffolk Council