

District Councillors Report to the Saxhams Parish Council 9 May 2019

You may notice the heading has changed this year from the Borough Councillors Report to that of the District Councillor for the new District of West Suffolk effective from 1 April 2019.

I have been most fortunate to have been elected as your Barrow Ward Councillor once again, though I was unopposed! Needless to say, along with whatever tasks I will be involved in on the new Council I will always support the residents of the hamlets of Gt & Lt Saxham and their Parish Council in any way I can. At the time of writing I do not know what Committees I will be on nor whether I shall be offered a Cabinet or Chair position. I am hoping to more or less continue in the duties I have been appointed to for the past four years. The Leading group has a slim majority split evenly between town and country wards though no representation was gained in Mildenhall, Brandon nor the growing area of Red Lodge.

The year at the Council has been consolidating progress on many projects particularly with proposed housing and business development. The waste hub is well on the way to completion, Marham Park at Fornham is being built, though this process will take some years to complete, 900+ houses etc., do take time to build. More locally, the new offices and increased facilities are nearly complete at Manns and the third tranche of housing development has started in Barrow. The large site adjacent to Westley is still in the Local Plan with our planners resisting pressure from a developer to build houses without providing the required road infrastructure on the whole site first.

The concept plans for a new leisure centre in Bury St Edmunds along with a hub for local partners such as the Police Service, County Council and NHS together with an expanded College campus and much needed student accommodation has been put to all (past) Councillors and accepted. The new West Suffolk Council will take these plans forward to completion.

The new Council will also be considering developments both business and housing projects across the whole of its geographic area. For instance there are plans for Brandon railway station, Doctors surgery and Leisure services, in Mildenhall a new Council Hub is to be built with the closure of the College Road Council Offices, the vacated land earmarked for new housing.

All Landowners in West Suffolk were requested, should they wish, to place parcels of their land to be considered for inclusion for the next Local Plan (SHELAA sites Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment). The applications closed at the end of December 2018. The planners now consider each parcel, or part thereof, using various criteria supplied by Central Government, the LEP's and County Councils, energy and water providers etc. In our area the growth of the Cambridge sub region and wider economy is included along with population trends, health and schools provision etc. it is a massive task. They will also refer back to the previous Vision 2031 Plan signed off in 2014 to see what constraints to growth were mentioned in that document.

Maybe some landowners have asked for land to be considered in the Saxhams, I do not yet know. In due course the Planners will issue out for consultation those parcels of land they 'may' consider. This is a formal public consultation with responses to be made on a form. All these responses become a public record and all are looked at and considered on their individual merits.

Once again this process takes a lot of time. If the Planners agree that a parcel of land can now be formally accepted (or rejected) the landowner/Developer may then put forward (with guidance) a concept plan for the site(s). Once again these plans have to have a public consultation, sponsored by the developer. This concept plan goes before Development Control who can either accept/reject or defer. Quite often deferral takes place so the Developer can address matters brought up in the consultation and/ or at the DCC meeting, very rare for an out and out rejection to be made. One was at Stanton, where the road layout was inadequate.

The next step is a fully worked up Planning Application which is also put before DCC, objections at this stage are also taken into account. From start to finish the process takes several years. We have taken professional advice and we (West Suffolk Council) currently have in excess of a 6 year land supply, this is land that already has planning permission. The Government target is 5 years. Developers have of late claimed we do not meet the minimum target which means, they feel, they have a right to build on land outside Vision 2031. They have not.

The Saxhams being largely designated as countryside or parkland are unlikely to see any large scale projects but some infill requests must be expected. The likely developments in and around villages nearby will have an effect on the Saxhams, so it is important to make your observations about any proposed development in any part of West Suffolk not just your own corner within the advised time frame.

As always I am available to talk to any resident and it is easiest to contact me by email ian.houlder@westsuffolk.gov.uk