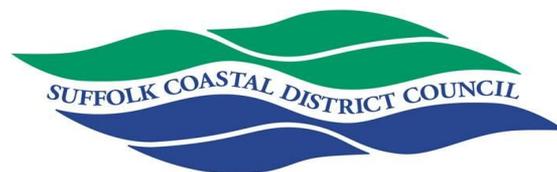


Cllr. Raymond Catchpole

Ward Member for Blythburgh with Bulcamp and Hinton, Bramfield and Thorington, Darsham, Dunwich, Walberswick, Wenhaston with Mells Hamlet, Westleton.

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ANNUAL REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS MARCH 2016

Across the District during the year there have been many activities involving the District Council:

Women's Cycling Tour – encouraging people in the District to live healthier lives, Suffolk Coastal hosted part of the national Aviva Women's Tour in June. This opening stage of the five-day tour attracted great crowds all along the route, with thousands of people turning out to support the riders.

Seafront Gardens –The multi-million pound Felixstowe Seafront Gardens restoration project has been completed with significant input from the Lottery Heritage Fund.

Protecting our heritage assets – A public consultation was completed in an effort to safeguard the heritage assets in the district. This provides the public with a set of clearly-defined criteria to help the council identify non-designated heritage assets across the district. The criteria have already been very useful in helping to identify and protect local heritage and the planning inspectorate has ruled in our favour on more than one occasion to protect a heritage asset in the planning process.

Empty homes plea –Owners of empty properties in the district were asked to provide information about the status of their property. There are over 690 empty homes in the district that have been empty for six months or more and a growing shortage of housing. Bringing empty properties back into use is beneficial to the owner and to the local community and environment.

Planning Scheme of Delegation – A revised approach to delegation of planning decisions to officers was implemented so that a panel decides in advance of planning committee meetings whether an application raises such important planning issues that it actually needs to be determined by committee. This scheme is working well and allows the planning committee more time to consider controversial applications and shape policy.

Travellers – We had problems with unauthorised travellers, a very sensitive issue with the public which places the local authorities in a very difficult position. We are once again examining the issue of providing short-stay stopping places.

Village of the Year – I was delighted to be a judge in the Suffolk Village of the Year 2015 competition in which Grundisburgh won through to the final round as Suffolk Coastal's award winner. Let's have entries from this ward in 2016.

Devolution – We voted to endorse the Suffolk Devolution Proposal which has been forwarded to Government. Devolution is about the transfer of powers and responsibilities from central Government to the local level. The key to success will be our ability to work together. The initial bid is an expression of interest, which we now need to develop in partnership with our colleagues in the other local authorities, police and health. The expression of interest outlines what areas we believe should be devolved to us – as well as identifying the expected benefits, such as economic growth, increased local skills or reduced burden on the tax payer. This is not just confined to Suffolk, we are committed to continued and enhanced cross boundary working across East Anglia, and are developing a joint approach around growth and productivity with Councils in Norfolk, New Anglia LEP and Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough LEP.

Brown Bins/Organic Waste Collection – We dug deep and found a way not to charge for this service.

Accommodation Project – Work on our new headquarters at Melton is progressing well. Everything is on schedule for the buildings to be completed late summer this year ahead of our move from the current Melton Hill headquarters next autumn.

We have selected a preferred bidder from the developers wanting to buy our existing Melton Hill headquarters site, identifying best value for Council Tax payers as well as the Council with the intention of exchanging contracts by the end of May 2016.

The plan is to create about 70 new homes on this site, of which about 33% will be affordable homes. Capital receipts from the headquarters and Cedar House sites combined will cover the cost of our new headquarters in Melton. So the project will be effectively cost neutral. We will be able to move to the new building without incurring any debt or imposing any additional burden on the Council Tax payer. This means that the reduction in the running costs of our headquarters will create financial benefits for the Council and local people for years to come. The new headquarters will be named 'East Suffolk House'.

A12 East Suffolk Energy Gateway: Suffolk County and Suffolk Coastal have set aside £450,000 towards building a business case for strategic improvements to the A12 between Ipswich and Lowestoft.

Partnership with Waveney: Suffolk Coastal and Waveney have been successfully working in partnership since 2008, when we appointed a joint Chief Executive. We were the first councils in Suffolk, and among the first in the country, to adopt this approach. This partnership working has played a key role in both councils' ability to drive down costs and provide more efficient frontline services, giving local tax payers better value for money. However, in the current economic climate, when Councils are being forced to put up Council tax for the first time in six years, we recognise that we need to continue to explore new and innovative ways of making savings. While we share staff and have a joint Business Plan, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney remain two sovereign councils, with separate Leaders, Cabinet and Full Councils, which represent their respective areas. There are no current plans to merge the councils, however we are looking at how we can continue to develop this partnership and will consider all the options open to us.

However, if the councils decide to explore the possibility of a merger, because it is felt this will help us to deliver better services and provide better value for money, this

would have to be agreed by both Full Councils, as well as there being public consultation and the Boundary Commission being involved. Any such proposal would be subject to a lengthy and full democratic process, which would be in the public domain over a period of years and would not be implemented before the 2019 elections.

Funding available: Our Capital and Revenue Grant Programmes can be used to fund new community projects or progress community activity. The programme begins again in the next financial year from April 2016. This is for major projects and is in addition to my own Locality Budget which enables £5,500 to be spent across the ward each year.

Budget: Suffolk Coastal will have to put up Council Tax for the first time in six years. by just under 2%. This is disappointing, as we have kept Council Tax frozen at 2010 levels, but it needs to be put into context – the increase will be less than £3 (or about 25p a month) for a Band D property, with their Council Tax rising from £149.40 to £152.37 a year.

The reality is that our funding from central Government has been cut by 40 per cent in the last five years. In the same period Suffolk Coastal also froze its portion of the Council Tax, leading to a reduction in our net budget of £3.7 million. Now Government is removing the Revenue Support Grant over the next four years – which will mean a significant cut in our core funding of over £2million by the end of the Parliament. Another essential part of our funding, the New Homes Bonus is also likely to be cut. Taken together, funding from these sources reduce from over £3.6m in 2015/16 to around £500,000 in 2019/20.

While Suffolk Coastal remains committed to continuing to find innovative ways of making savings through increased partnership working and improved efficiency, we need to make sure that we are in a position to protect frontline services, help provide more affordable homes and support economic development in the District.

Affordable Housing: We have always said that one of the key priorities for this Administration is to provide more affordable homes in the district. Young people and elderly people looking to downsize are struggling to stay in their local communities and are being forced out by the lack of affordable housing.

This is a complex area where, even when we do our part by giving developers planning permission, we cannot force them to build – so many affordable homes are not built, despite our best efforts. The existing system is simply not working well enough to meet our needs and the needs of local people. We have decided to take a bold and innovative approach to this issue and are examining proposals to invest £1.68million of the Section 106 money we have built up over the years into unlocking the development potential in the District to provide more affordable homes.

We will obviously have to work closely with colleagues on the Town and Parish Councils, as well as developers, to get this moving, but this is an exciting new innovation for Suffolk Coastal and shows our commitment to making things happen in this area.

National Living Wage: As a Council, Suffolk Coastal is embracing the new National

Living Wage, which becomes law from 1 April. All our directly employed staff earn above the level of the National Living Wage. However, we will have to see what the effects of this change will be as it works through, as it also affects the staff of our partners and contractors, so some of the costs could impact on our budget through these services costing us more in the future.

On Street Parking: The County Council administers where restrictions appear, with police enforcing the regulations and the money from penalty tickets going to Central Government. In reality very little enforcement is carried out which has an adverse effect on local people, business and tourism.

We are now in discussions with the Police and Suffolk County Council to try to resolve this situation and have suggested that responsibility should be devolved to Suffolk Coastal to manage and enforce on-street parking regulations.

If anyone requires any further information about the work of the District Council or if you have specific questions please do not hesitate to contact me at raymond.catchpole@suffolkcoastal.gov.uk. I supply a periodic report on the activities of the District Council to the clerk of your council which I am sure would be available on request.