

WEST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT
FOR HOPTON AND KNETTISHALL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
APRIL 2022

Once again we have all had an incredibly challenging year not least of all having to constantly react to ever changing covid scenarios often with reduced staffing levels and the added burden of extra workloads with for example having to administrate and pay all the various grants which the government have introduced to support businesses. This has been a major piece of work which still goes on and to manage it staff have been seconded from other areas in the council to do it. The flexibility and willingness of staff to move around and the way staff have adapted to working from home has been a revelation and although we are now moving towards being back in the office it is clear that ways of working will not return to being exactly as they were before.

One thing to come out of Covid is that we have seen that technology offers us alternative and sometimes more efficient ways of doing things and a new hybrid way of working is developing. We will have to ensure that where staff need to come together to work collaboratively, we have the facilities available. Equally when staff work from home we have to ensure they can do so in a safe and appropriate environment and we have to understand the needs of staff in relation to training, development, and support in this different environment.

We will always need some meetings to be in person, for example the regulatory ones Council, Development Control and Licensing Hearings but many briefings and training sessions lend themselves to be carried out virtually.

In these difficult times with very heavy workloads staff wellbeing, mental as well as physical, is and has been an important consideration and is not neglected and we carry out regular wellbeing surveys and work with staff on ways to address stress for example.

Normal business still goes on though . We took our budget for 2022-2023 to Council in February and I am pleased to say that despite all the pressures it has been created to be balanced and sustainable and to allow investment in the priorities of our residents and businesses and is designed to make our communities greener, healthier and more prosperous.

Just to mention a few things:

We are proposing to invest £9 million in a range of green initiatives to help us reach carbon neutrality by 2030;

Barley Homes, the council's housing company, is going from strength to strength and to date has built over 60 homes with more in the pipeline;

We are progressing the Western Way Development which will integrate council and government services, the NHS, leisure facilities (including a new swimming pool), an advice centre, third sector organisations and both community and education services as well as delivering new employment space;

We are working to provide over 40,000sq ft of start up/incubation space for companies in the manufacturing and engineering sector on the Suffolk Business Park to provide more employment opportunities;

We are well along the path to creating a new Local Plan the draft of which will be going out for consultation in May. This is a huge bit of work but is absolutely essential to ensure that we are able to meet the housing targets imposed on us by government and ultimately avoid speculative often inappropriate development.

We continue to help fund local organisations through our Community Chest which this year allocated over £466,000 to charities and organisations all over West Suffolk.

I have also been able to allocate around £3,500 from my Locality Budget to projects in my ward, providing funding for such things as defibrillators, materials for fencing, creation of a Jubilee corner and the cost of bands for Jubilee village events and there are more projects in the pipeline.

Finally you may have read in the press about the newly announced County Deal offer for Suffolk which we as the District Council welcome. It hopefully will give us across the whole county and particularly in West Suffolk the opportunity to gain more funding and drive decision making more locally rather than from central government. This is something we have always advocated and the offer is in recognition of the "Suffolk System" that is already in place. There is no suggestion that it comes with a need for a mayor or change of existing governance arrangements.

CAROL BULL
WEST SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILLOR
BARNINGHAM WARD
10/04/2022