

## District Councillor's report, March 2010

### 1. Local Government Review

Following the judgment by the Court of Appeal, on February 10 the Government announced its decision on unitary local government structures in Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk. In the first two, approval for unitary status was granted to Exeter and Norwich. However, in Suffolk's case the Government has taken no decision, but instead will set up a constitutional convention in the county to ask elected representatives to agree on local government structure.

In parallel with the new review process, Mid Suffolk has decided to seek an alternative model, of partnership with the neighbouring Babergh District Council. Against a background of reduced Government funding likely to lead to budget deficits of £0.5m-£0.75m in the years ahead and hence the need for further efficiencies, we now intend to build on the successful costs savings generated by the joint waste partnership with Babergh, by looking for other areas of co operation. The two district councils now plan to undertake a comprehensive joint review that seeks to develop fully integrated systems of service delivery and management and operational level by April 2011 at the latest.

### 2. Finance

At the Full Council meeting on February 25 a Council Tax increase of 2.5% was for the forthcoming financial year was approved. This equates to an annual increase of £3.69 per Band D household, so that 78% of householders in the District will pay an increase of no more than 7p per week. This result has been achieved as a result of significant cost savings, not all of which are painless. As one example, it has been decided to end the annual subsidy of £38,000 to Thornham Walks, with a final, one-off amount of £10,000, while the organisation is encouraged to seek alternative funding sources.

### 3. Affordable Housing

In the first nine months of the current financial year, 42 new dwellings had been completed, against a revised target of 60 for the full year. A further 40 units are expected to be completed by the end of the financial year, as a result of schemes in Wortham, Stowmarket, Barham and Fressingfield currently on schedule. The application for 113 affordable housing units at Great Blakenham (as part of the Snoasis development) are going through the due diligence process.

### 4. Planning

I recently heard very positive things about the new Enforcement Officer Karen Bolton, who has been described as "exceptional" in her ability to deal with even the most difficult customers.

### 5. Recycling

In spite of the severe winter weather, there was only one day when the waste collection crews did not go out, because of treacherous road conditions. Instead, they were redeployed to carry out waste collection tasks in and around Stowmarket. In the event of further bad weather in future years, Suffolk County Council will be providing and storing 20 tonnes of salt for Mid Suffolk's use, which will be cheaper than our present suppliers.

The recycling rate stood at 42.7% in the quarter to December, but should increase as a result of the improving weather.

Garden and trade waste services are seeing more customers signing up every week, but there is plenty of capacity for more and if anyone has any leads to those who would like to subscribe for the service please let me know and I will pass on their details.

6. Ipswich Street redevelopment, Stowmarket

The public enquiry is scheduled for April 27 and will last up to 3 days. Agreement has been reached with the United Reformed Church, which has agreed to relocate to the Scout Hall site, with a new Scout Hall and church building being provided at nil cost to either party. However, the church will not withdraw its objection to the Compulsory Purchase Order until a contract has been signed, which is not possible before April 27: hence the need for the enquiry, unless the objections are withdrawn beforehand.