



## **Annual Report for Walsham-le-Willows Parish Council**

### **May 2018**

**The District Council** – A possible merger of Babergh and Mid-Suffolk District Councils has been put on hold but options for greater joint working continue to be pursued. According to a 2017 telephone survey of approximately 4,000 adults in the Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council areas ½ were favourable to a joint council, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> were not favourable and 1/5<sup>th</sup> did not know. Fewer Babergh residents favoured merging and the councils decided to postpone plans for now. The possibility of future unitary status with Suffolk County Council has also been informally raised.

**Move to Ipswich** – Both Mid Suffolk and Babergh Councils moved into Endeavour House in October 2017 and join Suffolk Co. Co. and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (Health). There is a new website, tel. no. 0300-123-4000 and a customer access point at 54 Ipswich St., Stowmarket.

The merger has offered better opportunities for groups to work together and more joint meetings take place between the Districts and County Councils than previously. Customer access is moving toward being web based however the Stowmarket access point offers all services offered previously in Needham provided that prior notice or an appointment is made. Some meetings have been held in local communities, where IT and access capabilities have allowed.

**Redevelopment of Needham Market Council Offices Site** – Following vacation of the District Council offices in October 2017, proposals were presented for public review and comment during April. Plans are residential led but include some commercial development as well. Refer to [our website](#)

**Funding and Budget** – Mid Suffolk remains in a strong financial position at present. However reduction in Revenue Support Grant between 2015/16 and 2017/18 nationally was 47.6% while the reduction for Predominantly Rural Authorities was 56.9%. Rural authorities have therefore lost proportionately a great deal more than urban. Mid Suffolk is represented on the Rural Services Network which lobbies government to address funding inequalities affecting local transport, pupil premiums and other services.

District council taxes were raised by a modest amount for 2018/2019 equal to 81p a year for a band D property. New funding streams include housing generated Community Infrastructure Levy (introduced in April 2017) where 15% goes to parishes and increased Business Rates Retention. Parishes with a Neighbourhood Plan receive 25% of CIL.

**Housing** – Mid Suffolk successfully bid for £226,476 from the Government to develop community-led housing in partnership with local groups, and we plan to directly deliver 98 new affordable homes by 2021. During 2017 residents moved into the first shared ownership homes offered for 25 years.

**Ward Boundary Review** – The Local Government Boundary Commission recommendation is for Mid Suffolk to be represented by 34 district councillors, six fewer than current, with eighteen one-councillor and eight two-councillor wards. A decision is expected in August 2018.

**Planning** - Many communities in Suffolk including Walsham have seen an increase in planning applications granted outside village boundaries, this is because Mid Suffolk does not have an up-to-date Local Plan with a 5-year housing supply and therefore has less control over development; school places and other services are the County's responsibility but these usually depend upon developer finance being available.

Neighbourhood Plans are being promoted as a solution to the problem of development control and can influence planning decisions even if a District has a 3-year supply of housing. To date Mid Suffolk has one adopted NP, two under consultation, and 14 in preparation:

<https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-planning/neighbourhood-planning-in-mid-suffolk/>

**Local Plan** – The Draft Joint Local Plan was issued in August 2017, consultation closed in February. A revised version is expected in around October 2018, with expectation of Secretary-of-State review in mid 2019. Evidenced based documents that form part of the Plan can be found on:

<http://www.babergh.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/evidence-base/current-evidence/>

**Universal Credit Introduction** - This new benefit is being gradually introduced across the UK, replacing most means-tested benefits and tax credits for working-age people. Universal credit **full service** is being rolled out to all eligible new claimants and is in effect at Stowmarket Jobcentre Plus as from May 2018. Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice may be able to offer advice and support for any problems.

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