

2017 ANNUAL REPORT TO PARISH COUNCIL FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR WILLIAM SHROPSHIRE - LAVENHAM WARD

We come to the end of my second year as district councillor for Lavenham and they say 24 hours is a long time in politics, well 365 days can appear like a lifetime. The upheaval we have seen since April 2016 on an international scene has been profound. Brexit, Trump and the almost forgotten unsuccessful military coup in Turkey.

Locally budget constraints continue to affect the Conservative led Suffolk County Council, yet somehow they manage to increase school results, pledge funding for 10 new elderly care homes and all whilst freezing the basic rate of council tax, with a 3% direct adult care increase only.

Delve deeper in the political world and at Babergh district council we too have had budget constraints. Central government funding decreases annually at a fast pace and at Babergh we work hard to find savings and increase revenue to fund and facilitate improved and ultimately more services. Such monetary considerations have led to the main news of the year is that the office in Babergh will be shut and we along with Mid-Suffolk will move to Endeavour House in Ipswich (home of the County Council). A new spoke office will be set up in Sudbury Town Hall to supply services and face to face meetings for those in the west of the Babergh area and the online offering has been re-vamped to ensure a quicker slicker internet service as we drive through the technological age.

Other key decisions that dominated Babergh in the past 12 months were the election to move to a 'Cabinet Leader Model' of governance. This is, in simplistic terms, more like the central government in that a cabinet, made up of portfolio holders for certain areas, such as growth, communities, environment etc., head up decision making bodies to prevent queues for full council approval and to get 'business moving'.

We of course said goodbye to the previous Chief Executive and welcomed the new head man, Arthur Charvonja. Arthur has settled in well and is already providing strategic direction to a new look council.

A few statistics from the past year at Babergh:

- Babergh/Mid Suffolk are building **65** new council homes across the districts, with **14** already in the hands of their new occupants, whilst reducing number of owned unoccupied properties, having brought 97 vacant homes back into use.
- Funding for Community-led-Housing is up: **£430,000** of DCLG grants secured to promote community led housing and kick start the delivery of new affordable homes.
- Green Energy income is up: **£460,000** of income generated this year by solar panels installed by our Solar PV project, up by almost **70%** on last year. The project has now reduced CO2 emissions by **3.7 million tonnes** since June 2014.
- The Councils provided over **£725,000** in grants to community groups, comprising £492,184 in revenue funding and £233,526 capital funding. The capital funding represented 12% of over £2million total project costs.

So with all this going on inside the Babergh building, it was, at times, a welcome relief to get into the village and help the residents. The most enjoyable aspect of being a District councillor is helping residents with local matters, and the past year has been just as busy as the first. I have been

involved with many individual resident matters, but below is a list of village wide topics I have been part of.

We saw the referendum and successful adoption of the Neighbourhood plan, the first in Babergh. This is a document which directs planning decisions based on what the village of Lavenham can justifiably accept and take. It has already proven useful in planning matters.

We saw the granting of the planning for 18 affordable homes on the old gritting site depot on Melford road. Parish chair Carroll Reeve worked tirelessly to set up the Community Land Trust which took ownership of the site and then passed to affordable house builders Hastoe who will build and rent to or co-own with local people. This combined with the re-development of the garages in Bears lane into 12 affordable housing units shows the forward thinking nature of the village and will hopefully ensure those wishing to live and raise families in the village can remain and continue to do so.

The Wooltowns initiative to combine tourism marketing strength of villages such as Lavenham, Long Melford and Clare was re-ignited by parish councillor Roy Whitworth and this will continue to grow, increasing the reputation of the Wooltown brand for tourists who are vital to our vibrant economy in Lavenham.

Although we saw the closing of the post office counter, I was pleased that through action by the members of the parish council and myself we have a temporary solution by way of a visiting mobile van and this will continue until a permanent base is found.

The Sheltered Housing review in August was a disappointment. I was and am still not in favour of the way it was handled by Babergh or the outcome and I made these feelings known to offices and at full council. I continue to work with offices on behalf of residents in Spring Street who lost their sheltered housing status, however I am pleased that through dialogue offices have confirmed that Babergh will continue to provide contact of a scheme manager (by visit or call), continue grass cutting and provide options to re-instate alarms (all be it at individual cost).

Lastly we are beginning to see traction with the initiatives to prevent HGV's using Lavenham. The County Council have guaranteed a weight restriction in Water Street and are currently working on the design of this. The Local Government Association are calling for compulsory use of special commercial Sat Nav's for HGV's in all lorries and recently Lavenham's plight in relation to HGV's was highlighted in the Daily Mail. I hope that this time next year I can be talking about a successful weight restriction in situ.

So as you can see it has been a very busy 12 months in local politics. I said it last year and say it again I am honoured to be the district councillor for our great village. However I cannot be nearly as effective without the hard working, diligent and well organised Parish Council. I hope all residents appreciate the work that your parish councillors put in to the village, all voluntary and I look forward to continuing to work with them in the future.

Don't forget to vote in the County Council elections on 4th May 2017 and I wish you all the very best for the next 12 months.