

LAVENHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – THURSDAY 19TH APRIL 2018

2018 ANNUAL REPORT TO PARISH COUNCIL FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR WILLIAM SHROPSHIRE - LAVENHAM WARD

The past 12 months across the world have seen surprises, tragedies and the bizarre.

Teresa May won the 2017 general election, but labour made surprising gains; BA had to ground all flights from Heathrow as someone accidentally unplugged a switch; Uber was briefly banned in London; Prince Philip retired and Prince Harry got engaged; we had record-breaking snowfall in March and North and South Korea shook hands at the winter Olympics. Coupled with this we had ever more terrorist attacks in the UK, Europe and further afield, the Grenfell disaster and recently suspected clandestine activity on UK shores, reminding us how lucky we are to live in a relatively quiet (although beautiful and famous) corner of the UK.

So what about closer to home?

It seems we had more turnarounds than in past years: devolution scrapped; a Babergh/Mid-Suffolk merger put on ice and Babergh u-turning their promise to back the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in Lavenham.

In the chamber it was the same story as last year: budget constraints continue to affect the Conservative-led Suffolk County Council and Babergh District Council; intermingled with this, there has been some mischief amongst the benches as some councillors have played musical chairs between party and independent seats. Babergh has also, in my opinion, suffered due to pressure from central government to build more houses in the area. Incentives remain for house building and consequently, the direction of Babergh is all too clear to be seen and worryingly so. After all, the reason many chose to stay or move here to Babergh is because we have smaller villages, more countryside and aesthetic views. If we wanted to live in a brick and concrete jungle we wouldn't chose Lavenham or Babergh to begin with. Some development is good, and some is needed, but uncontrolled development and overdevelopment has no place in Babergh District.

The change of venue for the council I believe has actually worked and without too much distress or inconvenience. Central government funding decreases annually at an ever faster pace and the new Babergh system of working at Endeavour house alongside mid Suffolk, with spoke offices in Sudbury and Stowmarket will save nearly £6m over 10 years. The new communication lines are all set up as Babergh pushes its residents to access more and more services online or via telephone.

The council at Babergh itself has seen some changes. John Ward took over from Jenny Jenkins as leader; Jan Osborne took over as deputy leader and Lee Parker as chair of planning.

I mentioned above the turnaround on both the East Anglian devolution bid and then the proposed Babergh/Mid Suffolk merger. But another local government review is underway. The district ward boundaries. It is now in draft format and it is likely that Lavenham will go from being a single member contained ward around the parish itself, to a two member ward including other villages, such as the Waldingfields and Cockfield/or Acton. No doubt the change will be in force by next election.

A few snippets from the past year at Babergh:

- Babergh built the first council developed homes in 3 decades in the district and the first to be completed were in Lavenham itself. Glemsford also received district council funded homes and there are plans for 210 more homes to be delivered by Babergh District Council by 2021.
- Babergh council agreed to invest £3.4M in the council's leisure centres in Sudbury and Hadleigh.
- The council has been pro-active in generating new sources of income through financial investments. These are anticipated to produce £1.5M in 2018/19 alone, which will be reinvested into council services for you.
- £2.5m was invested in local theatres
- Babergh council attracted and secured £1.7m of external funding in the area.

Although the above shows some of the work the district council do, at the risk of sounding like a scratched record, funding is an issue and Babergh made the decision this year to increase their slice of the council tax by 3.25%, equivalent to £3.89 per year for a band B property. But remember, Babergh only receives approximately 10% of your total council tax bill – most of it goes to fund other public services including the county council, police, town and parish councils, which Babergh collect on their behalf but do not receive.

Within Lavenham itself we hit the headlines ourselves, sometimes for good, such as various awards won by businesses like the butchers, and awards for local people who have provided service and voluntary work, but sometimes the news was not so good. In particular the one that stands out was the East of England Co-op raid where the car used as a ram raid weapon ended up somewhere near the fresh vegetable section inside the shop. I spoke at length to Tim Passmore (Police and Crime Commissioner) about the increasing problem of ram raiding and general small-scale thefts in the aftermath of this and he assured me work was underway to prevent such repeat crimes across Suffolk.

The most enjoyable aspect of being a District councillor is helping residents with local matters. I have been involved with many individual resident matters the majority, but certainly not all, this year centring around planning as we saw 3 sites in Lavenham come up for developments of 20+ houses. There was also frustration as the floor in the 'call in process' was exposed to the detriment of a Lavenham resident, the good news is that this loop hole has now been closed for future 'call in' requests at planning thanks to this one application.

Within the village I was delighted to see the start of the Community Land Trust housing on the old gritting depot site on Melford road, as well as the completion of the play school new build at the village hall. I am also pleased to see that the Wooltowns initiative advertising and promoting the south Suffolk area, and centred around Lavenham, is thriving and gaining good support.

I finish, as every year, with the Water Street issue. We have been given a date of 30th April 2018 for the start of the temporary weight restriction to try and prevent as many HGV's using Lavenham. I mentioned last year that I hoped by the time of writing this year the scheme would be underway.

Well it has been like pulling teeth getting the County Council to initiate the promised scheme, but hopefully we are there now and it will start as promised.

Local politics seems to be as busy as ever, even though memberships across all parties are down. I thoroughly enjoy being the district councillor for our great village. Yet again the support and work of the Parish Council over the past 12 months is completely understated, and they, like many other residents who should also be thanked here, give up their free time to help make this village as good as it is. Please continue to support them and all volunteers of the village in their endeavours for Lavenham.

I look forward to the final 10 months of this term and leave you with the exciting news that in May 2019 it will be time to vote for your district councillor all over again, or depending on the boundary review, two district councillors!

W SHROPSHIRE

APRIL 2018