

Ward Members monthly newsletter – October 2019

New Felixstowe Leisure Centre gets the go ahead

At East Suffolk's Cabinet meeting, held on 3 September, it was agreed that a new leisure centre for Felixstowe would get the go ahead to bring a single destination facility to the town, which will serve the community and also attract people from further afield.

In November 2017, East Suffolk Council (then Suffolk Coastal District Council) published its Felixstowe Leisure Vision document, which showcases the potential for a multi-million pound sports and leisure development, highlighting the opportunity we have to re-vitalise our leisure facilities. Separately, the District Council has also embarked on a Leisure Redevelopment Programme to redevelop its leisure centres. Deben Leisure Centre and Leiston Leisure Centre has already been completed and work will start at Bungay Leisure Centre on 12 September.

The existing Felixstowe Leisure Centre was built in 1985 and Brackenbury Leisure Centre, also in Felixstowe, operated by the Council from the 1990s. Both facilities would need a significant amount of money spent on them to maintain their current offer.

Next Steps

- The Council pursues the delivery of a new wet and dry destination facility in north Felixstowe.
- Council officers will report back to Cabinet when the RIBA stage 2 design-work is complete, including a full build programme for the works and the facilities that will be included within a new 'destination' facility.
- Council Officers will also bring to Cabinet a Business Plan for a new 'destination' Felixstowe Leisure Centre to support the project.
- An East Suffolk Built Facilities and Playing Pitch strategy will be produced following the updating of the current ones. This will also support the producing of a new East Suffolk Leisure Strategy.

Community invited to identify potential wildlife areas

On Tuesday 3 September, East Suffolk Council's Cabinet agreed to two trial schemes, in Southwold and Saxmundham, which will see reduced grass cutting and strimming during 2020.

Residents in both towns are invited to suggest open spaces, owned by East Suffolk Council, which they feel would benefit from less intensive grass cutting and which could then become bio-diversity areas.

At present, grass in public open spaces across the District is cut four times each year, between March and October.

In response to the wishes of residents and as part of its focus on environmental issues, the Council is now reviewing its grounds maintenance programme, aiming to make it more environmentally-friendly. Reduced grass-cutting and strimming in specific areas not only creates spaces for wildlife but also reduces carbon emissions.

The trials in Southwold and Saxmundham will be evaluated by East Suffolk Council, East Suffolk Norse, expert bodies, the respective Town Councils and the community. It is hoped that the results will then determine a more environmentally focused grounds maintenance programme which can be rolled out across the whole of East Suffolk.

Suggestions for Southwold should be emailed to admin@southwoldtowncouncil.com and for Saxmundham to townclerk@saxmundham.org

Boost for new Woodbridge cultural event

A new music and arts festival, featuring live music, art, an eco-zone, children's activities, yoga and more, took place in Woodbridge on Saturday 31 August after receiving a funding boost from Cllr Rachel Smith-Lye, who allocated £1,3000 from her 'Enabling Communities Budget' to support the event.

East Suffolk Council's Enabling Communities Budget supports activities delivered by community, voluntary and social enterprise organisations. A total of £412,500 has been allocated for 2019/20 from the New Homes Bonus, funding generated through new houses built in the district.

Town centre toilets to undergo major refurbishment

Visitors to Lowestoft's town centre will soon benefit from improved public conveniences, with refurbishment work on some of the most frequently used facilities scheduled to start next week.

East Suffolk Council will be carrying out improvement works to the public conveniences at Gordon Road in Lowestoft, including the addition of a new baby changing unit which will be accessible to all. The public toilets will be closed temporarily from Monday 9 September whilst the works are carried out. The disabled toilet, next to the Wilko entrance, will remain open during the works, which are expected to take between 4 to 6 weeks.

It is estimated that over 145,000 people use these toilets each year and as a result, it is essential the facilities are kept in good working order.

Refurbishments include relocating the male toilets to create a more usable space and, in response to public requests, the addition of a separate baby change unit which can be accessed by all.

Energy efficient lighting will be installed as well as water-saving equipment which will conserve an estimated 150,000 litres of water per year.

During the closure, visitors are advised to use alternative facilities at The Triangle Market or the Gordon Road bus station.

Foxhall Planning Application withdrawn

An Outline planning application for 2,700 homes in Foxhall, known by the applicants as 'Orwell Green Garden Village', was submitted by Gladman & Orwell Settlement Trustees to East Suffolk Council on 15 May 2019.

An extended consultation period took place in June and July and following consideration of consultation responses and feedback from the council the applicants choose to withdraw the application on 22 August 2019.

Women on Wheels Kesgrave was a great success

The first ever Women on Wheels Kesgrave event took place on Sunday 1 September and saw girls and women of all ages and abilities get on their bikes to raise over £460 for charity. Local groups and businesses also got involved with the Grundisburgh and Tuddenham WI's providing cakes and volunteers for the refreshment stops and the East of England Coop providing teas and coffees for everyone involved. All the profits from the entries go towards supporting two nominated charities; Fresh Start New Beginnings and Lighthouse Women's Aid.

Voting now open for the Enabling Communities Award

As part of the East Suffolk Business & Community Awards, the public are invited to vote on the Enabling Communities Award. The finalists for this award have been shortlisted from all the community projects that have received funding from the Enabling Communities Budget or Exemplar Grant over the past 18 months.

Voting is open to the public until Monday 30 September. The winner will be announced at the awards dinner at The Hangar, Kesgrave Hall on 3 October. For an overview over the finalists, go to www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/voting-now-open-for-the-enabling-communities-award/

Insight into the Housing Portfolio

Housing Strategy

The Homelessness Strategy is to be presented to Cabinet on the 1st October followed by the Development Strategy and the Housing Asset Management Strategy in November. This will leave a corporate Enabling Strategy for early next year. Work to develop a policy and procedure for Temporary Accommodation is to start shortly.

Tenancy Services

This year we have implemented new Predictive Analytical software called RentSense and are continuing the contract for this for a further year to demonstrate its long-term ability to reduce our Officers case load and in turn arrears on accounts. Early indications are that arrears have plateaued and are starting to reduce.

We are introducing new digital channels for Tenants in early 2020 with a Tenants Portal and text messaging allowing customers to access their rent account balances and make payments 24/7. In 2020 we will be putting together a tenant engagement strategy to further strengthen our engagement with our tenants.

We will be continuing with successful projects such as 560 London Road South, Lowestoft. This is East Suffolk Council's first House in Multiple Occupation and is in partnership with Solo Housing to provide good quality housing for single homeless people. This has been so successful that we are looking for other sites to refurbish in the same way, and other Local Authorities are also copying this model.

The purchase of another long-term empty property at 98 Park Road, Lowestoft, empty for 20 years, has enabled an exciting refurbishment project which should be completed by the end of the month

Housing Maintenance

East Suffolk continues to invest in its housing stock, maintaining and improving properties for our tenants. £6.8M is provided for investment this year (19-20) and will deliver programmes such as rewiring, new heating, replacement roofs, kitchens and bathrooms to name but a few.

Since the tragic Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 East Suffolk has scrutinised its only high-rise tower block St Peters Court, Lowestoft. A great deal of investment has been made to the building to ensure it remains as safe as possible for tenants. Works have been completed to install a full sprinkler system, replace all flat entrance doors with new 1-hour fire protected door sets, replacement of all window reveals with fire protected boarding, and various other internal works. The work is now underway to further review the exterior cladding on the building. The cladding is known to be of a very different type and fixing method to that of Grenfell, none the less, further investigations are underway to confirm the detail of the installation in conjunction with a registered fire engineer, building control and Suffolk Fire and Rescue service.

Following Council's earlier declaration of a Climate Emergency we are now starting to think about our approach to environmentally sustainable property maintenance and refurbishment.

Housing Development & Enabling

Lowestoft Post Office – it is hoped a full planning application will come to Planning Committee in November and I would like to invite ward members for a tour and discussion beforehand.

Suffolk County Council (SCC)– Children and Young Persons Services and Mental Health and Learning Disability Commissioning Team /Adult & Community Services (ACS), are looking for new homes in Lowestoft and Felixstowe. East Suffolk Council do not have any stock that meets their needs. Homes for sale on the open market are now being looked at as potential options. One option would be for SCC to lease properties acquired by ESC.

Training Hubs for Trades and Apprentices- discussions are taking with CITB, West Suffolk College and New Anglia LEP with a view to increasing training opportunities to help young people wishing to enter the building trade and to help meet the growing skills shortage,

Housing Development

Duncan's Yard – our award-winning development at Duncan's Place was handed over in July 2019. All units are occupied, and the residents are settling in.

Brampton – We have entered into contract with Orwell HA to develop our first shared ownership of 6x 2bed houses in Brampton. Wellington (the contractor) have recently started on site. These units will be ready for occupation in autumn 2020.

Community Housing Funds Schemes

School Lane, Bawdsey – we have now signed and sealed a funding agreement with the Peninsula Villages Community Land Trust (PVCLT), a CLT comprising members from 6 parishes (Alderton, Bawdsey, Boyton, Hollesley, Shottisham and Sutton) to fund their acquisition of 4 affordable houses at School Lane, Bawdsey from Crocus Homes (Development arm of Saffron Housing Trust). This is the first acquisition being funded through the Community Housing Fund which is aimed at tackling the lack of affordable housing in areas of high second home ownership. We are really pleased that we have got this project over the line.

Alderton – We are working closely with the PVCLT in order to bring forward another community-led scheme at Watson Way, Alderton. This project is in its infancy, however we are looking at repeating the success at School Lane, Bawdsey

Southwold Hospital – We are continuing to support SouthGen and Hastoe Housing Association to deliver a community-led scheme in Southwold for 9 affordable units. At a recent National Housing Federation awards event this project was highly commended in its group. Congratulations to Southgen, it has been great to work with them.

Commuted Sums

Parham – We have agreed in principle to fund Orwell Housing Association to convert two shared ownership houses into affordable rent houses on a rural exception site in Parham. This will be funded through our commuted sums fund and will provide more rented stock in the area meeting a local need.

Housing & Health

Private Sector Housing – The transition to East Suffolk Councils has been seamless and the new PS Housing strategy is now fully operational across the District. Of particular note is the high level of interest in the renovation grant, particularly in the Lowestoft area.

The team has been tackling some difficult issues, with colleagues in planning, around the letting of industrial premises, in two locations, for housing – contrary to housing and planning law.

The team have recently been filmed for the BBC programme Housing Enforcers and, assuming they make the cut, will be seen on television this autumn.

Focussing on specific areas:

Fuel Poverty – Warm Homes Healthy People

The Stepping Home project which supports patients to solve housing issues that are preventing them from going home, continues to grow and in August we were approached by the West Suffolk CCG and asked to deliver the same project in the West of the County. The inaugural meeting for this project was held recently and the project will start in October ready for the winter pressures that hospitals experience. *(East Suffolk Council are involved in a West Suffolk project because we are the lead authority for all the Suffolk Councils on fuel poverty, energy efficiency and Warm Homes issues)*. The project is fully funded by the CCG.

Warm Homes continues to work with the Rural Coffee Caravan to deliver energy advice in rural areas and we were awarded funding to provide information on SMART metering. The first events around this are targeting residential park homes and will link in with other energy advice for these communities.

We delivered the full initial allocation of ‘First Time Central Heating’ grant for gas homes by the end of July and have successfully bid for funding from National Grid Affordable Warmth Solutions to install over 200 more gas central heating systems across Suffolk over the next 2-3 years. The take up of oil systems under the same funding regime, has been slow and we are working with a range of partners to try and increase the awareness of the link between cold homes and ill health to try and reach more vulnerable households who could benefit from this funding. We are also able to offer air source heat pumps for suitable properties.

Private Rented Sector Energy Efficiency Standards.

It has been unlawful to rent out a property with an energy efficiency rating of F or G since 1 April 2018. In April 2020 this rule applies to existing tenancies. Landlords can register an

exemption if any of the works required to improve the rating cost more than £3500 or there are other reasons, such as the Listed status of the building, that prevent them from improving matters for their tenants. There have been discounted and free insulation schemes around for many years and little excuse not to top up insulation. The team have beginning to contact landlords with these poor performing properties and will shortly be issuing penalty notices against those who cannot demonstrate good reasons for not addressing the situation.

Home Improvement Agency

East Suffolk Council is part of the Suffolk wide Home Improvement Agency which provides a service to residents needing disabled adaptations. The contract ends in December 2021 and work has begun to review the service and define the nature of the future agency support. This piece of work is seen as particularly important against a backdrop of an ageing population and the pressures on the health and social care system.

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