

# May 2013

## County Councillor Annual Report

### **0% Council Tax Increase Agreed**

This year, the council agreed to not increase its share of council tax this upcoming financial year, indeed the leader of the council went on to pledge that the next 4 years would not see any increase at all, of course this does not preclude the District council or the Police from raising their percentage, and the freeze grants from government supporting these tax freezes are only committed on a year by year basis.

### **Cabinet Agree Schools Decision**

The County Council agreed to go ahead with the review for the Stowmarket and Stowupland pyramids under the Schools Organisational Review programme, thus enshrining the move to close Bacton Community Middle School and extend the Primary School and High School terms by two year groups. I attended all of the meetings during the consultation period, listening to the concerns of parents. During the consultation I have had a number of constituents contact me, expressing their concerns in equal numbers, some objected to the changes, some wanted the changes to go ahead, and some wanted the changes to happen a year sooner.

### **Better Broadband**

This year saw the County Council backed project to deliver better broadband for Suffolk take a huge leap forward, last year we secured government backing for the £41.7 million fibre optic backbone for Suffolk, this year the tender for the contract to deliver this was signed with, two bidders came forward for this contract (Fugitsu & B.T) with upgrades to the existing network being programmed shortly, already villages such as Old Newton have moved from less than 1 mbps to some residents getting a speed of 50 mbps.

### **Suffolk Highways out toTender**

The county council decided to put out to tender the entire Highways service in an attempt to save 2 million pounds per year, the preferred private sector company would be responsible for the design and implementation of highway maintenance and improvement works, winter gritting, street lighting, traffic signals and bridge works throughout the county. After the first preferred bidder (Balfour Beatty) dropped out, it has been recommended to authorise the award of a contract to maintain Suffolk's highways to a joint venture between May Gurney Limited and WSP UK Limited (MGWSP).

### **Review of County Farms**

The County Council looked into the future of County Farms, the county council owns and rents out 12,800 acres of farmland 170 acres of ancient woodland, 85 farms with buildings and houses etc, with a total of 97 tenant farmers making use of this resource. For over a decade no new tenant has been able to get a tenancy. I was asked to be a member of this group where we set the future of this land holding. Many options were put forward including selling off the land, but I was delighted that we decided to hold on to the asset and radically reform the structure, we are now actively promoting the land, by allowing any potential tenant to express interest in any part of a holding, at any time during a tenancy, as well as allowing anyone to see where these land holdings are. This new policy should mean that young Agricultural pioneers, care farms and community agriculture schemes get a better chance of accessing this asset.

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