**Annual Report 2016/2017 by Keith Welham, MSDC Councillor for Creeting St Peter and Stowupland.**

The last 12 months has been a period of change within Mid Suffolk, in Europe and in America. Who would have predicted Brexit and Trump? Like it or not, Brexit and decisions being made by the Trump administration will affect us all for many years to come. Decisions made locally are having and will continue to have more direct impact upon residents of Mid Suffolk.

Devolution of power from Westminster to a combined Suffolk and Norfolk Authority was very much on the cards but some Norfolk councils found the terms of the offer unacceptable and, with no compromise possible, the offer was withdrawn.

Nick Gowlrey became Leader of the Conservative administration at Mid Suffolk in May 2016. Charlie Adan resigned as Chief Executive of Mid Suffolk and Babergh councils and has been replaced by Arthur Charvonia. Staff of the two councils will be moving to Endeavour House in Ipswich around September 2017 where they will take over part of Suffolk County Council’s headquarters building. The Needham Market offices will be closed and a ‘call in centre’ will be provided in Ipswich Street, Stowmarket. A complete overhaul of IT and telephone systems will be complete in time for the move. The promise is of a clear website that is simple to use for people to do a range of transactions on-line, such as pay council tax, claim benefits or order a brown bin. A single phone number, 0300 123 4000, should now reach the council with callers then directed to the correct team.

A fundamental change to the way MSDC makes decisions will come in from May 2017 with the setting up of a cabinet system of governance. Instead of key decisions being debated in Executive Committee meetings where representatives of all political parties are permitted to take part in a public debate, decisions will be made by cabinet or even by a single cabinet member.

14 new council homes are now completed and in the hands of the occupiers and 23 houses have been purchased in Mid Suffolk to help address the loss of council homes through the right to buy scheme. The income gained from the Solar PV panels installed on council properties is up 70% on last year and the project has reduced CO2 emissions by 3.7 million tonnes since 2014.

Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils plan to borrow £50m at low interest rate then use an incorporated structure to invest in commercial property. A motion by the Green party that 50% of this investment by Mid Suffolk District Council should be in the District was rejected as too risky.

An enterprise park has been established in Stowmarket, which could attract several new businesses and up to 1000 new jobs. A number of initiatives are making good progress to encourage businesses in the area – Open for Business and Food Enterprise Zones as well as projects encouraging schools and businesses to work together to engage young people.

The Council has set a balanced budget for the next year and there is to be a 1.6% increase in council tax (5p per week for a Band D property).

Over £300,000 in grants has been awarded to community groups across the district and represents about 12% of the total cost of the projects involved.

20 tonnes of glass is being collected for recycling each month in Mid Suffolk and there is a 6.5% increase in the business waste service.

A review of the wards across Mid Suffolk District Council is being carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. This has been triggered by so-called “electoral inequality” – in this case because 11 out of the 30 wards have a variance (in electors) of over 10%. (The ward of North Stowmarket has increased in size by more than 30% since the last review, in 2001). The review determines total number of councillors, number of wards, boundaries of each ward, number of councillors in each ward and the name of each ward. There will be public consultation on the proposals later in 2017.

I am a member of Development Control Committee. I am also a member of the Countryside and Public Realm Services review panel and the panel developing a new leisure facilities strategy for Mid Suffolk.

I have helped a number of residents with housing and other queries. I have held two councillor surgeries but find that I am more likely to be approached at the Saturday coffee morning in the church hall. I have attended most of these throughout the year and the recent pie night.

I have enjoyed the last year and I am happy to be contacted on any relevant issue by phone, 01449 673185, or by email - keith.welham@midsuffolk.gov.uk.

Keith Welham