

Creeting St Peter Annual Parish Meeting. 21 May 2018

Report by Keith Welham, District Councillor for Creeting St Peter and Stowupland

- **Planning**

Work is still underway in the preparation of a new Joint Local Plan. The first round of public consultation generated over 1000 responses. The next draft of the Plan should be ready for consultation in September 2018. Submission of the member approved document is planned for January 2018 with an Examination in Public by an independent Inspector later in the year.

A Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Expenditure Policy has been agreed and a first round of bidding runs from 1 to 31 May 2018. This is an opportunity for Parish Councils and community groups to put forward local projects to be funded from the MSDC slice of CIL

- **Housing**

A new joint in-house maintenance team (BMBS) has been formed to oversee all the repairs and improvements to the council housing stock. It is hoped that this will eventually create savings for both councils and an improved level of service for tenants.

During the year I received queries relating to three council-owned properties in Creeting St Peter. I believe that all were dealt with satisfactorily.

- **Finance and Organisation**

Core funding from the Government has decreased again and will reduce to zero by 2019/20, so there has been another 0.5% increase in Council Tax to create a balanced budget for next financial year. The Council has moved its offices to Endeavour House in Ipswich and is making claims that this will save £5.8M over the next 10 years. However this figure is for both Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils so is actually only approximately £2.9M and that's for both capital and running costs. And it isn't saving we will see. If the councils hadn't moved to Ipswich, they would have retained only one office as a head office so the true "saving" is even less. And had the two councils moved into a single office in either district there would also have been some considerable savings made.

A Capital Investment strategy to create 'profit for purpose' is now underway, borrowing at low interest to invest in property or projects to provide an income to support council provided services. Some of the proposed £25M has been invested in commercial and retail premises outside of the district.

MSDC has again not spent its budget (underspending has been on average £700,000 for each of the last seven years). Over roughly the same period of time, they have been squirrelling away about £10 million from Government grants received for getting homes built (New Homes Bonus).

- **Enterprise**

Land earmarked for the Stowmarket Enterprise Zone (Gateway 14) has been purchased by the Council as an investment.

The Council have invested £2.56M into the Regal Theatre in Stowmarket to create two more screens. A new joint Economic and Tourism strategy has been created to help attract businesses to the districts.

- **Communities**

Over £81,000 was awarded in capital grant projects across the district, which has enabled another £500,000 of external funding to be allocated. Individual members of the council were given a locality budget of £6,250 to allocate to projects within their wards. Projects benefitting from this in Creting St Peter were new tables and chairs in the Church Hall, a barbecue set for use on pub nights and other community events and fencing works at Fen Alder Carr Nature Reserve.

Now is a good time to think about projects for funding from my 2018/19 Locality allocation. Any project which will give a community benefit will be considered.

- **Boundary Review**

The Boundary Commission are currently reviewing the ward boundaries within the district and there will be a reduction in the number of councillors for the election in 2019. The final round of consultation ended on 30 April and it looks likely that Creting St Peter will be included in a two-member Needham Market ward, along with Creting St Mary. The final recommendations should be published in August. I will be very disappointed if this comes to fruition; I had hoped to continue to represent Creting St Peter after the next elections.

- **Is the merger with Babergh still likely?**

Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Council proposed a merger and this was approved by both councils subject to a detailed business case showing that the merger would be beneficial in terms of finance and service delivery. At the end of March, Colin Noble (Leader of SCC) appointed consultants to consider alternative local government structures for Suffolk including disbanding all District and Borough Councils within the county and setting up unitary authorities (or a single county-wide unitary). This has caused the proposal to join MSDC with BDC to be called into question. However, District Council Leaders across Suffolk have asked Colin Noble to halt the work of the consultants to allow a collaborative review involving all district councils, the police authority and the health sector as well as the county council. Colin Noble has refused to do so and there appears to be a stalemate situation. It is therefore almost certain that there will be no merger before the May 2019 District Council elections.

Keith Welham

Email: Keith.Welham@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Telephone: 01449 673185