

## District Councillor Report for Bramford January 25

### **Revised National Planning Policy Framework**

We had a meeting with the expecorate in December and we were warned very early that the government is revising the housing need numbers, it puts our numbers required from 386 a year to probably double and we can't use the overbuild that we have already done, this is a big blow to protecting our villages from large developments. The consequences of the numbers changing means in appeal a developer can argue that all our in-place documents don't allow for enough houses and therefore carry less weight. The main one is The Joint Local Plan Part 1, but it also may affect neighbourhood plans and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. This puts us in a difficult position, but we have already made a decision to re write the plans and we are one of the first planning authorities to get the ball rolling to deal with the housing requirement mismatch.

### **Devolution**

The recently published White Paper on devolution hints at significant changes to the current two-tier system of local government, even though Suffolk is not mentioned by name. It suggests the possibility of replacing district councils with a single, large Unitary Authority for the entire county or splitting Suffolk into two. It may be that it is an east and west authority or a Greater Ipswich and then surrounding area. I feel this is the most likely for the Labour government to implement as it is good for them politically. I imagine that Greater Ipswich would include Bramford, Stowmarket and Felixstowe as an economic powerhouse and the rest would be more residential and slower burning. It would mean that there are less elected representatives and more of a mini parliament, this is speculation, but It will be very difficult to get right. Another key proposal in the paper is the establishment of a "Strategic Authority," which could involve appointing a mayor to oversee both Suffolk and Norfolk. Many of my colleagues are concerned and I for one am extremely worried that we will lose representation and fewer councillors will mean less ability to handle case work in our areas, Suffolk County Council has applied to join the fast-track process for mayoral elections planned for May 2026, which means the Government would cancel County's scheduled elections this May.

### **Scrutiny**

This Month the Scrutiny Committee looked into complaints made against the council in the last year, which have increased mainly due to reform in the council housing side, but also in waste collection and planning, we have decided to look further into housing and planning to make sure all is being done to look after residents. Although there were many complaints only a small amount went to the ombudsman and were seen as an issue.

### **Closure of Elmswell Services**

Mid Suffolk District Council has ordered the immediate closure of EG On The Move's Elmswell Services, located off the A14 at Kiln Lane, due to unaddressed road safety concerns mandated by planning conditions.

The services, which include a fuel station, Spar store, Greggs, and Starbucks, opened before Christmas despite the council's earlier refusal of the project over highway safety risks, particularly related to the site's exit design. While the Planning Inspectorate overturned this refusal on appeal, it required strict pre-opening compliance with specific safety measures, which were not met.

This afternoon, the council issued a Breach of Condition Notice to EG On The Move Ltd., forcing all businesses on-site to halt operations until the required conditions are fulfilled. An additional Enforcement Notice was served due to the absence of approved Construction and Surface Water Management Plans, deemed essential by the Planning Inspectorate.

If conditions are not met within three months, the council may prosecute the site owners.

### **Cabinet Meeting 7<sup>th</sup> of January**

The Cabinet has met and made a couple of decisions, which will take effect from 16th January 2025. Regarding Council Housing Rents and Service Charges (MCA/24/39), the Cabinet has approved Option A, amending the Rent and Service Charge policy to provide to attempt to get the service to cover its costs. This change, forming part of the annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget and rent-setting process, includes measures to cap increases at £9.61 per week (£500 annually) for general needs housing and 10% year-on-year for sheltered schemes. Final charges will be determined in February 2025. These changes reflect the Council's belief that tenants should pay only for services they directly benefit from, while safeguarding essential communal services and aligning with regulatory expectations.

Additionally, the Cabinet has endorsed the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Economic Strategy (MCA/24/40), recommending its approval by the Council. The strategy outlines a clear vision for economic resilience and growth, tailored to the specific needs of the district. Authority has been delegated to the Director for Sustainable Communities and Economy, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member, to update the strategy as required and develop an action plan for delivery, to be brought back to the Cabinet in April 2025. Both decisions underline the Council's focus on fostering thriving communities and shaping a prosperous future for the district.

Kind regards

Cllr James Caston