

Business Growth and Increased Productivity Portfolio Report

1. Open for Business

BMDC- Both Councils have now signed up to the **Screen Suffolk Project** which should enhance management of filming enquiries, enable greater promotion and streamlining of our approach as a 'film-friendly' county and supporting a 'no boundary' approach to filming in Suffolk. Not only should this positively impact upon Suffolk (BMSDC) by use of our natural and built assets, it should have positive impacts on the local economy and generate additional income.

Officers have recently attended a regional workshop on the impact of the **Apprenticeship Levy** on businesses, they will be signposting this information through our business networking and other contacts. Officers will also be signposting information in the same way in relation to the **Valuation Office Changes** affecting NDRV, including appeal and transitional relief details.

We are also in the peak season for support requests to the multi-agency **Joint District Safety Advisory Group** – chaired and co-ordinated by the Licensing Team. At the next meeting on the 21 March, the Group will be meeting with the organisers from the **National Sheepdog Trial / Suffolk on Show Team**, a prestigious event which will be coming to Haughley Park on the weekend of the 28th-29th & 30th July.

Improvements to the A120 and widening of the A12 – Haven Gateway Partnership have been instrumental in promoting these projects which have been out to consultation, that period has now ended. Both Councils have been very supportive of the two projects and have duly replied to the consultation. These strategic routes although outside our Districts, are very important to the strategic road infrastructure connectivity that we seek to achieve right through Suffolk and beyond, thus encouraging economic business and housing growth into both Districts as well as through Suffolk generally.

Visits to Businesses are a continuing and important part of the teams work and we are being effective in the approach we make. To gain a much greater understanding of each business and gain trust provides opportunities for the team to support the business in different ways whether that means signposting them to funding streams, relocation possibilities or providing guidance through Council Departments, possibly by allocating one of our growing team of Business Account Managers to be the person they contact for support and information. This work is intended to help business growth and through that process to enable support for our communities with greater employment opportunities.

Officers are working at a Suffolk as well as a local level on a response to the Government's **Industrial Strategy Green Paper**; this work must be completed by April 2017. In conjunction with this we will be supporting a Suffolk Chamber of Commerce event on the 21 March with businesses at Wherstead Park. A member briefing is also being hosted at Needham Market on the 22 March.

2. Planning updates

- 100% of MSDC Majors applications determined in time for Quarter 4 16/17 (01 January 17 to 14 Mar 17) - Earlier Quarterly Majors performance 16/17 YTD is as follows:
 - Quarter 1 – 77.3%;
 - Quarter 2 – 92.9%;
 - Quarter 3 – 100% which cumulatively represents a YTD (as at 14 Mar 17) overall figure of 87%.
- 40 dwellings approved in Quarter 4 to 14 Mar 17 - 1032 dwellings approved in YTD (as at 14 Mar 17)
- Planning Officers and Tech Support team now based in one office. Benefits of this include:
 - Training on the new Uniform IT platform can be undertaken easier with the team in one place
 - Following PAS advice to improve planning performance we have now introduced a single new application validation process
 - Trialling using our Hadleigh offices as a 'landing point' – this will allow for greater understanding of what planning customers want from our 'landing point' and allow the rotation of DM planning and A&T staff through our trial 'landing point' at Hadleigh so that obstacles to good customer service can be identified ahead of a move to Endeavour House
 - To iron out any other problems that we may have prior to the Endeavour move by working as one team. We will be better able to handle the move having worked flexibly and cross boundary in one team
- Smartphones for all planning officers now in place (to provide access to emails and telephone when off site and remove the need to be tied to a landline)
- Microsoft Surface Pro 4 and Dell Latitude tablets now being trialled in planning (flexible working will be key when we move to Endeavour and tablets are more suitable for this purpose than older style bulky laptops)
- 2 x Large Screen Displays and stand up meeting tables introduced into the planning department. This will allow us to conduct more efficient meetings, sometimes with external parties utilising the large screen displays to show plans, maps etc. The screens will also be used to display performance information on a rolling basis to aid with departmental awareness of targets, progress to date and successes

- Client Side Panel Forum - formed to help shape and inform the changes we are intending to make. We have a range of members from consultants to architects to housebuilders who contribute across key planning topics including policy, highways, heritage and infrastructure. Officers are pleased to see positive outcomes already being reached.

3. Planning Policy Update

Approval was given in summer last year to produce a new joint local plan with Babergh. Work is now substantively complete on updating the evidence base for the new local plan, including population growth, housing demand, employment land supply and demand, a new call for sites for housing land, town centres and retail capacity. The Council now has one of the most up to date baselines of any planning authority in Suffolk and, following approval of the local plan project plan last week at Executive Committee, work has commenced on drafting the Plan.

Throughout the last year, collaborative working with Suffolk County Council has increased, leading to joint working on information databases – to enable better mapping of infrastructure requirements. Pilot projects aimed at assessing infrastructure requirements in areas experiencing development pressures have commenced using this shared information.

In addition, there has been considerable progress on digitising all data associated with producing the Local Plan. Projects to map all submissions from the call for sites (for analysis for inclusion on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment), mapping of village settlement area boundaries and transfer of information of all Section 106 Agreements to a compatible system with the new operating software for development management has been undertaken and is now mostly complete.

The Council has played a significant role in progressing the Suffolk Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Framework (SPIF) – a framework document that will guide growth and determine infrastructure provision for the whole of Suffolk. Work on the SPIF is ongoing and expected to be published in summer 2017.

4. Neighbourhood Planning

In the last year the service provided by the Council for neighbourhood planning has been overhauled. Support to Neighbourhood Planning groups is now being provided from within the Planning policy team and information about policy, capacity, and about legislative requirements is now standardised. A new approach to developing NPs has been established resulting in much higher levels of engagement than hitherto. We await the results of the examination of this function by the Scrutiny Committee to guide further improvements.

There are currently 10 parishes approved as designated Neighbourhood Plan areas, with one – Mendlesham - being made tonight. We also have further interest from a number of other parishes, including cross border collaboration with Diss.

5. Community Infrastructure Levy/Infrastructure

The Community Infrastructure Levy was successfully introduced in April last year, since which time over £500,000 has been collected within Mid Suffolk. Work is now progressing to establish policies for approval by Members that will guide expenditure on infrastructure priorities within the district.

Work has also been successfully undertaken on collaboratively producing a development framework for Ashes farm at Stowmarket, a “stalled site” which will now enable an application to be made and for the development to proceed. This new approach was endorsed by Executive Committee at its last meeting.

Gerard Brewster