

REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR RICHARD SMITH MVO

TO ALDEBURGH TOWN COUNCIL 12 DECEMBER, 2017

In many ways regarding local matters the last month has been quiet, yet in other aspects it has proved to be very busy.

The County Council's draft budget for 2017-18 has been published and examined in detail by the Scrutiny Committee. Although the details are likely to change, due to refinements when exact details are known and when Government grants are confirmed, likely expenditure on the provision of services throughout Suffolk will be in the region of £480 million. Two-thirds of this will be concentrated on our priority areas, the care of the frail elderly and young people at-risk, and spending in an era of cost reductions will rise in these areas. Back-office expenditure continues to be reduced, but we are near the end of savings in this area. I hope to be able to find more capital funding so that we can continue making adequate investment in our roads, with the aim that investment now saves on maintenance and repair in future years.

My party will keep its pledge, made at the last County Council election, not to increase basic Council Tax and bills which will go out in March will show exactly the same monetary requirement as they did in 2010.

I have travelled around Suffolk giving budget presentations, in all to eleven meetings, some under the auspices of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils, others at the invitation of District Councils, and this year I have been present at all five of the Ipswich Area Committees which, in effect, operate as very large parish councils.

The crucial diary date for me is 9th February, when Suffolk County Council meets to debate and decide on the budget. At present the state of play is all-square, with the administration and all combined opposition parties having 37 Councillors each – there is one vacancy. So the debate and voting will be interesting, to say the least!

My time on budgetary matters has had to be shared with the launch of the Sizewell C Stage Two consultation. On this topic, I have attended many meetings with County and Suffolk Coastal District councillors, both to be

briefed on the proposals and to express initial comments. On 6th December the two Councils hosted a meeting of town and parish representatives, which I hope your two delegates found useful. I am pressing for a second similar meeting to be held around the middle of January as an opportunity to share thought-through responses before consultation replies are sent to comply with the deadline of 3rd February.

Time is short, but both Councils did press EDF hard to agree to a twelve-week consultation, which is the government-recommended norm. For reasons I cannot fathom EDF refused this request, meaning we all have a lot of work to do in a short period of time.

I do hope Aldeburgh Town Council's response will include an insistence on the Sizewell Access Road (formerly referred to as the D2 route) being built as a pre-condition of approval. This route, leaving the A12 south of Saxmundham will proceed east, joining up in part with the existing Saxmundham to Leiston road and extending right up to the proposed site entrance for Sizewell C. The most easterly part could be built alongside and at the same time as the proposed 'Green Route' railway line, which would be cost-effective and environmentally beneficial. The whole route, planned and almost built in the 1990's, would provide a sensible route for most of the huge volume of traffic generated by the building of Sizewell C and would give a legacy benefit to the whole area. Needless to say, EDF are playing hard-ball here. They say they will not fund the new road, even though there are demonstrable cost savings and efficiencies to then of a shorter route into their site from the south. Alas, unless we can force EDF to change their mind by the weight of community support, it is likely that this route, despite all its advantages, will not be built.

May I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and hope that all the Christmas festivities in the town, including the Boxing Day swim, pass off well.

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