Setback for Stowmarket Area Planning

The long-running saga of the Stowmarket Area Action Plan (SAAP) has been extended for a further 6 months, due to Government dissatisfaction with some aspects of the draft published last November. They criticised the lack of specific locations for brown-field building (homes on previously developed land) and the increase in proposed housing numbers from 1400 to 2000 without sufficient justification. Plans for increased employment land and shopping areas had also not been adequately justified.

As a result a further draft is being prepared, the work to be overseen by a small panel of councillors, including myself. Planning officers will seek to better justify what they have put forward, but as your representative I will continue to argue for reduced numbers and phasing which ensures building on Chilton Leys does not begin until it is genuinely necessary because the Cedars Park and Ashes Farm developments are nearing completion.

I have asked for a phasing policy to ensure that the disruption of major development does not take place simultaneously in all locations. If higher housing numbers are accepted, phasing policy should ensure that more sustainable locations should be developed first, with brown field sites included. Phasing will also be necessary to enable sufficient infrastructure to be provided in a timely manner. The capacity of the Councils and partners to simultaneously control up to six major developments in Stowmarket is questionable.

With decisions about Middle School closures deferred, options for the southern part of Chilton Leys should be kept open for the first 5 years of the SAAP, i.e. until 2015, when a revision of SAAP will be due.

Another local concern is the possible link road to a yet-to-be-chosen junction to the A14. It is wholly implausible to defer consideration of this for three years while awaiting the result of sustainable transport improvements, when SCC has neglected the town’s transport needs for more than a decade, except for the much delayed new B1115 bridge. The new developments envisaged in SAAP will not fund sustainable transport infrastructure (buses, cycle paths) within the three year time-scale for a decision.

It is thus necessary to make improvements to walking, cycling and public transport at once, if the need for major road linkage is to be diminished within three years. If this cannot be afforded, the SAAP should ensure development on Chilton Leys does not commence until sustainable transport improvements have taken effect, which is unlikely to be earlier than 2015.

The new SAAP Submission Draft should be available for public comment from 12th April to 24th May, and Onehouse Parish Council have arranged a Councillors Surgery for 17th April to make the new material available in the village. This should include a new design brief, suggesting how the new development should be laid out.
The Suffolk Green Party welcomed the news that the woman who spearheaded the campaign to ban throwaway plastic shopping bags has been recognised in the Queen's New Year Honours list. Film-maker Rebecca Hosking has been appointed an MBE for services to the environment in Modbury by promoting reusable bags.

Locally however there is still a long way to go, and fears that the plastic bags are on the increase again. Particular criticism is levelled at Marks & Spencer, which trumpeted its ending of free plastic bags by claiming “there is no Plan B” but local fact-finding shows they are once again handing out thousands of bags at both the Ipswich and Bury stores. When challenged on the matter, the checkout operators knew nothing of any policy to end or even discourage free bags. This from a company that emphasises its training of staff.

“The Government never followed through by imposing a bag tax, and now many shops are back-sliding, with bags freely dispensed at checkouts and littering the countryside again.”

A further meeting is to be held in February to assess the ideas put forward and progress the best of these to ease difficulties in the short run and ensure far better travel arrangements in the future.

Talks begin on Health Centre access problems

A long-standing Green Party campaign, and local transport plan priority, seems at last to be bearing fruit. Almost since the new health centre was built at Violet Hill, local Green Party campaigners have criticised the unsatisfactory pedestrian access, minimal public transport and car parking difficulties. Asking nicely produced no result at all, and was followed by a banner-waving demonstration, (pictured) which put the issue on the front page. We alerted Suffolk County Council and the Primary Care Trust chief executives to the opportunity to buy adjacent land for a footway but this was passed up by both.

Last autumn, Councillor John Matthissen put the issue on the Mid Suffolk District Council Scrutiny Committee agenda and made a short presentation to councillors and bosses of the PCT. As a result a workshop session of many interested parties was held in January and all present agreed there were problems that must be addressed. Participants included county, district and town councillors, representatives of the police, PCT, county highways and the owners of the health centre building.

Green Party Accuses Major Retailers of “Back-sliding” on Plastic Bags

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“Don’t Be a Tosser”

There’s no need to wait for BBC Suffolk’s Mark Murphy to relaunch the campaign to tidy up around Suffolk, and to discourage the idiots who throw rubbish onto the roadside. With the snow gone (we hope!) and vegetation dying back, it is all too easy to see the litter.

Please get out when the sun is shining and clear your length of road. Then volunteer for one of the local teams that go out and tackle some of the edge of village “hot spots.” Support from Mid Suffolk DC is available in the form of hi-vis jackets, bags, gloves and picking sticks. Also collection of large quantities of waste.

If you see fly-tipping, get the car number, and report details of date and time to 0845 606 6067.

A Green Party councillor recently identified a fly tipper in Haughley. The offender disputed the £80 penalty and was fined £100 + £650 costs in the magistrates court.
Winter Potholes
While the widespread damage to local roads appears to be the result of nature’s harshest winter for many years, the consequences were not entirely inevitable. Back in the 1980s the Green Party campaigned long and hard against successive increases of maximum lorry weight. We argued that Suffolk’s roads were not suited to huge vehicles, and widespread reconstruction of the county’s road network would be necessary if 44-tonne lorries were permitted. Since then many millions of pounds have been spent strengthening bridges, but basic road maintenance has struggled to keep pace with the damage. It is those cracks which the frost and snow have exploited to damage many roads and leave us with a huge repair bill.

Paupers Graves, Onehouse
Onehouse Parish asked for help to strengthen the boundaries of their woodland at Paupers Graves with additional hedge planting. I was pleased to be able to match this with a request from Stowmarket High School for outdoor community projects. In an all-day task organised on November 6th, 100 trees mostly saved and donated by local people from Onehouse and nearby villages were planted by a team of 15 pupils, and protected with tree guards also donated locally. Job done.

Harleston
Although one of the smallest villages in Suffolk, the vigilant and active citizens of Harleston continue to keep their village in tip top shape. A replacement village sign crafted by local artistic blacksmith Graham Chaplin will soon erase memory of the reckless motorist who destroyed the old one.

Shelland Green
The rare native black poplar trees which we planted along the stream last winter have made good progress and will eventually complement and replace the historic poplars that have graced the green for centuries.

Mill Road, Buxhall
Some unauthorised activities in this area have now ceased, and planning enforcement processes while slow are continuing. It is only fair that everyone is subject to the same regulations guiding what may and may not be done in the countryside, to ensure the village remains one of the most attractive in the district.

Clty Lane, Great Finborough
Having eventually established through the planning process that this is not a suitable location for intensive use by heavy goods vehicles, the remaining HGV business has planning permission for a new building elsewhere. I am pressing for them to find a temporary alternative depot while that is constructed.

New Housing, Great Finborough
With the popular playground and car park now in daily use it is encouraging to see how well new homes in Finborough are selling despite the housing market downturn. This is surely in part because this is a friendly village with a good range of services. A special welcome to new residents and first time readers of Green News.

This year interest turns to detailed design of the football pitch and considering what other sports facilities it might be possible to include in the bottom field. Everyone’s views “young and old” will be welcomed by the Community Council who will be working on this project (look for details in the next village newsletter). Some additional fund raising and grants will be necessary as the developer is only required to provide a 5-a-side football pitch.

I have asked the developer if the site fencing can be re-arranged in the bottom field so that the footpath and circular walk via Pear Tree Place can be brought into use.

- More trees are always welcome, provided they are native species. If you can care for them in pots or a shady spot until autumn, that is best of all.

NHS DENTISTRY AVAILABLE NOW!
THE STATION VIEW PRACTICE, WHICH THE LOCAL GREEN PARTY HELPED ESTABLISH, IS TAKING ON MORE PATIENTS - CALL 01449 613369 TO REGISTER
Green Councillor wins review of policy over parking tickets

Bury is to review its policy on issuing parking fines, following a fine levied on an 84-year-old war veteran who lost his appeal against penalty, despite legitimately holding a blue badge.

Mark’s View on Big Unitary Councils

“Large unitaries are only for bureaucratic convenience and lack democratic accountability. The new set up of full time local politicians in these vast unitaries is a long way short of what people want right now.”

Schools Disorganisation

As we widely predicted the P.F.I funding to scrap middle schools under the schools organisation review appears to be running out, with new school buildings having renewable energy installations and Eco friendly building materials sidelined because of “financial constraints” being imposed on the process. The delay caused by the money problems will mean extra years of mayhem for some pupils, and cost millions in council officers time.

One cost effective way to boost schools attainment and keep up teacher morale within tight budgets would be to join up existing schools in partnerships to deliver 2 tier style education without whole scale disruption for all concerned.

Green Party county councillors Mark Ereira-Guyer and Andrew Stringer are in the forefront pressing for solutions that will retain schools in local communities and provide some certainty for teachers, parents and children.

Contact Your Local Green Councillor

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