

REPORT BY JAAN LARNER - issued 29 March 2018

Dear Parish Councillors

Please find attached the annual review of South Norfolk District Council's work over the past 12 months.

South Norfolk Council – Annual Review

There are 380 Councils in England and South Norfolk Council is officially one of the highest performing. The respected Local Government Chronicle placed us in the Top Six Councils nationally at its awards ceremony. And elsewhere, we were the first public sector organisation in Norfolk to win the coveted Investors In People Platinum designation for the work we do to enable our staff to work more effectively and efficiently to serve you better.

Last year 1300 new homes were delivered in South Norfolk. That's nearly 1pc of the entire national total of new homes. There are now many more affordable homes locally than before the right to buy started and our housing team are finding two socially-rented homes for families every business day.

But new homes need to go alongside investments in the infrastructure that improves quality of life. At Wymondham a £4m investment in better leisure & fitness facilities has seen a 60% increase in the number of visitors and we now teach 2000 youngsters to swim each year. We're just about to start a similar £2m upgrade at Long Stratton on top of the completion of a new All-Weather pitch so that more and more people have the chance to lead healthier and active lifestyles.

Broadband is another key piece of infrastructure and we have signed a contract with a local provider to increase the number of fast-internet radio masts from 10 to 28. This means that by this Summer the 5000 homes that BT cannot and will not connect to fast broadband will get proper access to the digital world – Broadband is a critical utility and we will be one of the first rural districts to get 100pc fast broadband coverage to everyone.

A planning application has been submitted for the Long Stratton Bypass and homes to be built alongside. There is a lot of work to be done before it becomes a reality but the finance is in place to deliver it with Council, Government and Developer Contributions.

Together with improvements at the Hempnall Crossroads, the dangerous Hales junction and shortly after, the developer-paid George Road, Loddon roundabout, contributions to the Diss Market Triangle and a new school in Wymondham, housing development is paying the bill for improvements that improve quality of life for everyone.

It's not just about housing and infrastructure and strengthening the economy. You Council seeks to solve peoples' problems one family a time. A good example is the way we help people stay independent in their homes for longer. This sort of work saves the NHS a fortune. In the last 3 months we have had a staff member sitting at the hospital as people are admitted to the ward. We identify the people who will be needing a little help at home when they get better: perhaps a hand rail in the bathroom, a wheelchair ramp or even something as simple as booster-feet under a favourite chair. We do this work whilst the patient is getting better so they can get home quicker.

In just 12 weeks we helped 100 people, halved the average stay in the hospital and saved 380 bed-

days and life was better for each of these people as they recovered – some of whom could have been one of your aunts, uncles, parents or grandparents.

That's just one example of our work which covers preventing homelessness, sorting our debt problems, helping youngsters find a rented home or ensuring that landlords keep their promises to tenants.

We mustn't also forget the work we do to help small businesses and this year we have been able to reduce the rates bills of the smallest firms by more than the Government expects so that, especially, rural pubs, shops & garages can remain open for longer.

Everyone knows that finances are tight in local Government so we have invested in becoming a low-cost operator. It means that our Council Tax has grown 20% less than inflation since 2007, yet we do more. As an example, 62% of our ten most popular transactions are now applied-for online via our website. It means that we have fewer administrators, can deal with problems faster and at times when it is convenient for our customers – even if the office is closed.

These efficiencies are important, but they are not enough if we are to deliver the 86 services for residents So that's why we are looking to more with our neighbours in Broadland Council. Both councils have similar geography, scale and outlook. We are seeing whether a single team that works for Both Council will benefit our communities on a scale residents can recognise and relate to.

Working more closely together offers both councils increased capacity and resilience, together with greater financial stability whilst taking advantage of commercial opportunities to deliver better value for our residents. Our taxpayers expect a local government that moves with the times and innovates, while retaining and attracting the most talented staff, offering them positive futures and career development opportunities.

Our joint aim is for two strong councils, working together with the ambition and resources to make our combined area one of the best places to live and work in the country.

Finally, all these things work on a district-wide basis. But we're delivering locally too. We still offer community grants and very locally have assisted projects in Brooke like the WI Community Café that combats loneliness, the Mens Shed in Poringland that does so much good work in the community. We contributed to the Brooke and Claxton defibrillators and helped Bergh Apton put on the Village Play. In Seething a contribution was made to the new playpark and we have contributed to protecting the common areas in Chedgrave.

Everything we do aims to make Better Lives and Stronger Economies for everyone whilst keeping the cost down with a dedicated team of staff members and Councillors working with the other parts of Government to improve lives one family at a time, one street at a time and one place at a time.

As always, if you have any comments or queries, please let me know.

Jaan Larner
District Councillor - Chedgrave and Thurton Ward
South Norfolk District Council